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ABSTRACT

Factors contributing to program success or failure were evaluated at 16 English colleges. Questionnaires were distributed to 231 teachers with 59 of those questioned further during an interview. Respondents emphasized the importance of good teaching, committed and knowledgeable teachers, and effective and appropriate processes for recruitment, orientation, assessment, tutoring, and student support. They agreed on factors, typically outside teacher control, that can have a negative impact on student achievement, such as college resources, changes to programs of study, and course scheduling. Follow-up interviews revealed that teachers in programs with high student retention and achievement rates based their teaching on interaction and partnership with students and believed that effective teachers adapt and develop their teaching to meet student needs. Equally significant was the finding that teachers in successful programs worked collaboratively with their peers as well as with college administration to achieve their goals. Teachers in programs with low student success rates blamed their supervisors, students, or both. They suggested that the students, not the teaching methodology, needed to change. Suggestions for improving unsuccessful programs included: (1) engaging teacher's value systems and their concept of teaching role; (2) working with teachers collaboratively; and, (3) reexamining the role of college administration as it affects teachers. Appended are a list of colleges that participated; a description of research methods; letter to survey respondents; questionnaire; guidance notes for college coordinators; and a data sheet for each course/program. (Contains 14 tables and 17 references.) (AJ)

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Improving colleges

Why courses and programmes improve or decline over time

Paul Martinez and John Maynard

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John Maynard

Acknowledgements

This report builds on the qualitative findings discussed in *Pride or prejudice: college teachers' views on course performance*. The focus here is on the detailed statistical analysis of the survey results.

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Summary of key messages

- There are strong elements of similarity and continuity in the views of college teachers drawn from a wide variety of relatively successful and unsuccessful courses and programmes.
- Teachers emphasise the importance of good teaching, committed and knowledgeable teachers and effective and appropriate processes for recruitment, induction, assessment, tutoring, quality assurance and student support.
- Teachers also agree the factors with a negative impact on student outcomes. These are factors, which are typically outside teachers' influence or control: resources, changes to the student cohort, timetabling and course administration.
- There are also some evident discontinuities. Teachers from courses with the highest and improving student success rates were most optimistic about the impact of changes.
- By contrast, teachers from courses where once high student success rates were in decline were the most pessimistic about change.
- In the survey, and contrary to expectations, the views of teachers from *low baseline, declining* courses tended to resemble the views expressed by teachers from *high baseline, improving* courses.
- Contrary to expectations, teachers from *low baseline, improving* courses were not particularly optimistic about the impact of changes.
- The follow-up interviews helped to explain these apparently paradoxical findings.
- Teachers on courses with high student retention and achievement rates seem to base their teaching on interaction and partnership with their students. In their view, effective teachers adapt and develop their teaching to meet the needs of their learners.
- Teachers from courses with low student success rates which are not improving or which are declining, seem to blame either their managers, their students or both. They suggested it is not their teaching that needs to change, but rather their students.
- The interviews also point to the importance of unwritten or implied contracts in colleges. Teachers from the most successful courses emphasise in particular the contracts between members of teaching teams and between teachers and their students.
- Teachers from the least successful courses tend to stress the importance of implicit contracts with college managers, which have broken down.
- Teaching teams appear to have an ambivalent role. Effective, confident and autonomous teams appear to sustain and enthuse teachers from the most successful courses. In unsuccessful courses, teams seem to support and confirm the view that there is little or no scope for improvement.
- Efforts to improve colleges that do not engage teachers' value systems and the ways that they conceive of the teaching role, are not likely to be successful.
- Improvement strategies that seek to engage teachers will also need to engage the teams within which teaching is planned and delivered.

- College managers need to renew their unwritten or implied contracts with teachers if they want teachers, in turn, to renew and develop their partnership with students.

Introduction to the research

The issue of how to improve the quality of colleges currently has high political, professional and managerial priority. Although colleges remain under-researched, compared with schools, there is a large and growing literature in the public domain and in the grey area of unpublished research dissertations and research produced for internal consumption with colleges (Martinez 2001). The research reported here was designed to shed some new light on college improvement issues by focusing on what could be seen as the engine room of improvement: individual courses and programmes.

The research question can be put quite simply:

- What makes the most difference between courses or programmes where learner performance improves and courses and programmes where learner performance declines?

Subsidiary questions included the following:

- Are there differences between courses where learner performance improves from a high baseline position, compared to courses which improve from a low baseline position?
- Are there differences between courses where learner performance declines from a high baseline position compared with courses where learner performance declines from a low baseline position?
- Where learner performance improves, do teachers tend to attribute the improvement to their own agency and discount the importance of factors that lie outside their control?
- Where learner performance is declining, do teachers tend to attribute the deterioration to factors outside their control and discount the importance of their own agency?

Research design

The research was undertaken in two stages: quantitative and qualitative. In the quantitative stage, invitations were sent to around 40 colleges, which had participated in at least two of the first three rounds of action research projects to improve retention and achievement. These projects were supported by the Raising Quality and Achievement Programme, founded by DfES and led by LSDA (for discussions of this programme, see Martinez 2000a and Cousin 2002).

The invitations were thus addressed to colleges that were known to be actively interested in improvement issues. A group of 16 colleges was established, comprising 13 FE and tertiary colleges and three sixth form colleges. The colleges are geographically spread across England and included colleges that operate in a range of

local contexts from inner city to small town and rural locations. The colleges that took part in the research are listed in Appendix 1.

College coordinators attended two seminars to determine the:

- overall research design
- design of the questionnaire
- criteria for the selection of the sample
- process of administering the questionnaire.

- A more detailed note of the research design and process is attached as Appendix 2. The survey instruments are also included in appendices as follows:

- questionnaire: Appendix 3
- covering letter to accompany the questionnaire: Appendix 4
- guidance notes for college coordinators: Appendix 5
- example of data sheet for each course/programme: Appendix 6.

College coordinators selected teachers who would be invited to complete the questionnaire. Teachers were selected from a cross-section of courses with high or low baseline positions. In this context, baseline position means high or low success rates in the academic year 1996/7 were relative to the norm for each college. Success rates were chosen as the best single indicator of the relative success of a course. The success rate is the proportion of students who start (from the first census date of the first year of a course) and go on to achieve their qualification. In other words, success rates can be calculated by multiplying **retention rates** by **achievement rates**. Two further selection criteria were that teachers had taught on the course for at least 2 years and that the course or programme should have a minimum group size of 12 starters (to minimise the effect of random variations).

College coordinators distributed the questionnaire and returned the completed questionnaire to LSDA, together with data sheets giving performance indicator information for each of the courses or programmes included in the survey. The analysis of the survey data was provided to college coordinators in the summer of 2001. The analysis was not disseminated, to avoid prejudicing the follow-up interviews that were arranged by the coordinators and took place between September and December 2001. Interviews were completed with 59 teachers, who were available on the day of the visit to the college and who were willing to be interviewed. Almost all the teachers were interviewed separately. There was no evident bias towards more or less successful courses in the interviews: the interview sample resembled the questionnaire sample. The interviews covered the same topics as the survey, but were otherwise unstructured. Interviewees were assured that their views would be treated in confidence and that no individual teacher, course or programme would be identified in any publication arising from the research. Judging by the forthright way in which teachers expressed their views, they appear to have had confidence in these

arrangements and not to have felt constrained by the interview process. These interviews comprised the qualitative phase of the research.

Structure of the report

The structure of the report follows the two distinct phases of the research. The first part introduces and analyses the outcomes of the quantitative, survey phase. It draws some conclusions and poses some questions, which are then addressed in the second part, which examines and reports on the interviews with college teachers.

PART 1 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Introduction

There are already many case studies of college improvement. Over 220 improvement projects generated by the Raising Quality and Achievement (RQA) Programme are available at www.rqa.org.uk. There are also syntheses of college improvement strategies based on case studies generated by the RQA Programme (Martinez 2000b and 2001, Cousin 2002). There are also some syntheses of improvement activities that have occurred outside the RQA Programme (Kenwright 1997, Martinez 1996 and 1997, National Audit Office 2001).

The case studies have the weaknesses and strengths associated with an action research approach. They are empirically based, collaborative, real world projects. They have a strong focus on improvement and the transfer of successful practice, together with a level of detail sufficient to facilitate replication and transfer and to allow practitioners to make their own judgements about relevance. On the other hand, they are also variable in their method, the rigour of their analysis and sometimes the robustness of their data. It is difficult, moreover, to derive generalisations concerning 'good' (still less 'best') practice, transferability to different context and, sometimes, cause and effect relationships. The case studies do not distinguish easily those strategies that have had a particularly large impact on retention/achievement and those with a relatively small impact. Finally, because of an understandable reluctance to report improvement efforts that have failed, the improvement case studies lack a control group of colleges where improvement efforts have not been successful.

The aim, therefore, of this part of the report is to extend the field of college improvement research by applying more quantitative research techniques to a structured sample of courses within colleges.

The research design

The research design was inspired by some research undertaken by John Gray and others which is published as *Improving schools* (Gray *et al.* 1999). The methodological innovation developed by Gray combined elements of methodology from both school effectiveness and school improvement traditions. A sample of schools was selected to include schools with different baseline positions and different rates of improvement. A cross-section of staff in each of the sample schools was surveyed to gather information about different causative factors and process variables.

The relationships between the school type (baseline position and degree of improvement) and the causative factors and processes were explored through statistical analysis. Gray concluded by drawing three tentative conclusions:

> *... 'rapid' improvement was linked to changes in the schools' use of various tactics for maximising exam grades, the development of policies for supporting teaching and learning; the degree to which they have begun to tackle the process of teaching and learning at classroom level; and the extent to which responsibilities have been given to pupils*
>
> *schools which had improved more 'rapidly' had higher proportions of teachers reporting that there had been 'substantial' changes in the quality of teaching and learning over the last 5 years. In 'slowly' improving schools only a very small proportion of the staff (typically around 1 in 10 or fewer) reported similar changes*
>
> *there are some suggestions that while schools seem to have launched change initiatives on many fronts, their approaches to improvement could be bundled together. Schools which did some things also did others. The most rapidly improving schools seem, however, to have found ways of straddling distinctively different approaches at the same time*
>
> Gray *et al.* 1999 p135

Research hypotheses

Earlier work on teachers' attitudes in further education (Martinez 1999) found that:

- factors to do with resources, the nature of the student cohort and college management are generally perceived to have a negative impact on student achievement
- factors to do with teachers and teaching are generally perceived to have a positive impact on student achievement
- teachers who made more pessimistic observations about their work tended to emphasise the influence of negative factors on student achievement; teachers who tended to make more optimistic judgements tended to emphasise the importance of teachers and teaching on student achievement
- the issue is by no means clear-cut: teacher attitudes are highly individual and colleagues in the same teaching team may have diametrically opposed views.

Research on staff opinions conducted in the context of work on student retention and achievement came to broadly similar conclusions. In the main, teachers on programmes with relatively poor student outcomes (in terms of retention and achievement) tended to explain these in terms of external factors. At the other extreme, teachers tend to attribute high retention and achievement rates to their own agency (Martinez and Munday 1998 pp75–6).

In the light of these findings and Gray's work, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- there would be different patterns of response between teachers working on different categories of course
- the most marked differences would occur between courses where results were improving and those where results were declining.
- teachers on improving courses would tend to attribute improvements to their own agency and to factors over which they have most control
- teachers on courses where results were declining would tend to attribute the decline to factors over which they had little or no control
- the baseline position of courses would affect the patterns of response, but there were no specific expectations concerning such patterns.

Analysis of the response

We received 231 completed questionnaires for 136 different courses/programmes. In terms of level of programme, these split into the following proportions (rounded to whole figures):

- Level 1 (14%)
- Level 2 (25%)
- Level 3 (62%)

Four types of qualification accounted for three-quarters of the completed questionnaires:

- GNVQ (27%)
- NVQ (14%)
- AS/A-level (22%)
- National Diploma (12%)

The questionnaires were mainly completed by teachers who were organised in relatively small teams and teaching on full-time courses undertaken by 16–19-year-old students:

- 83% of the courses were full-time, 17% part-time
- the range of hours of teaching per week per course was from 2 to 30; 16 hours was the mode and 14.25 hours was the median
- roughly half the courses lasted for 1 year and half for 2 years
- 80% of courses were primarily for 16–19 year olds and 20% for students aged 19 plus
- 5% of courses had one teacher; 32% had 2–3 teachers; 36% had 4–5 teachers; 25% had 6–10 teachers and 2% had more than 10 teachers.

Many of the respondents had two or more roles. They described their roles in the following ways: teacher (66%), tutor (57%), course leader (45%), other (8%). The roles add up to more than 100% since respondents could select any and all of the roles.

A further analysis was undertaken to investigate whether respondents who were course team leaders expressed different views from teachers, tutors and other respondents. In general terms, teachers and tutors tended to give slightly *more positive* assessments of the impact of change than course team leaders, although this was not usually statistically significant, even at the 10% level.

The exception to this observation occurred in respect of changes to the student cohorts. Here, course team leaders were significantly *less negative* in their assessment of the impact of changes to the student cohort, in terms of students' motivation, ability, learning skills, clarity of career goals, their personal problems and how near they lived to college. With this notable exception, it seemed safe to conclude that course team leaders have broadly similar views to those of the teachers, tutors and other members of staff included in the quantitative research.

Overall findings

Year-on-year stability

One major finding is that success rates on the different courses and programmes varied considerably over the 3 years of the survey, and more than could be accounted for by changes to teaching, teachers or student cohort or other factors. This implies a substantial amount of more-or-less random variation at course or programme level. There are two further implications. First, the degree of year-on-year variation tends to 'muddy' the data and imposes a requirement for a cautious and careful interpretation. **Second, and in the context of management concerns to improve performance, too much significance should not be attached to a single and perhaps untypical year's retention and achievement rates for an individual course.**

Success rates varied considerably from year to year. On the assumption that 'stability' implies an annual upward or downward movement of no more than 10%, performance at course level seems to be quite *unstable*. Specifically:

- only a quarter of courses had stable success rates over all three years
- just over half (53%) had success rates which were stable over two years
- just over a fifth (21%) of courses had success rates which varied by more than 10% in two successive years
- consistent success rates over three years could be at high or low levels

- where success rates were stable for two years, the 'rogue' year could be in any one of the three years and the 'rogue' success rate could be above or below those of the other two years
- where success rates were unstable, this could be with an upward or downward trend, or with no discernible trend either way.

The extent of year-on-year variation prompts the question: does the presence or lack of stability colour teachers' views? To investigate this question, two further analyses were undertaken with a specific focus on those high and low baseline courses that had **maintained** their performance over the 3 years. The hypothesis to be tested was whether greater stability was associated with a more positive assessment of the impact of various change factors.

This proved not to be the case. There were relatively few occasions where the views of teachers from the more stable courses proved to be different from the others in a statistically significant way (even at the 10% level). Even where differences could be detected, there was no pronounced pattern: teachers on the more stable courses were more optimistic about some and less optimistic about other change factors, compared with teachers on courses with less consistent outcomes.

Rates of change over the 3-year period

Before asking teachers to assess the positive or negative impact of changes, they were asked to score each factor for the rate of change. The choice that was offered was between little or no change and significant change. Somewhat to our surprise, most respondents scored most factors as having changed only a little or not at all.

Factors that a third or more of respondents identified as changing significantly are listed below. The figures in brackets refer to the percentage of respondents who agreed that the factor had changed significantly. As we shall see, most of the changes seen as significant are also identified with a negative impact on retention and achievement. Only three changes are generally seen as having a positive: emphasis on improving teaching and learning, observation of teaching and learning and amount of support for at-risk students. The changes that *most* respondents agreed had changed significantly included: amount of course administration, time for preparation, morale and number of teaching hours. All of these are seen as having an adverse effect on student retention and achievement:

- amount of course administration (54)
- time you have available for preparation (52)
- morale within your team (48)
- morale within your department or faculty (48)
- membership of your course/programme team (42)
- number of teaching hours you have (40)
- emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning (38)
- observation of teaching and learning (37)

- ability of students (36)
- amount of paid part-time work done by students (36)
- arrangements for key skills (33)
- your departmental/faculty headship (33)
- administrative/clerical support (33)
- time available for team meetings (33).

In response to the final, summative question, respondents were asked to identify the changes having the largest negative or positive impact. Again, figures in brackets refer to the percentage of respondents who identified the change as having a particularly negative impact:

- resources (53%)
- support for teachers (40%)
- student cohort (34%)
- timetabling (31%)
- course organisation and administration (25%).

The changes with the most positive impact were identified as follows:

- support for students (45%)
- teaching (44%)
- personal tutoring (38%)
- staffing (38%)
- assessment and feedback (31%).

Two alternative but compatible inferences can be made concerning teachers' general perceptions of change. Major changes tend to be associated with negative impacts on student outcomes. The factors that were most widely seen to be changing significantly are mainly seen as having a negative impact on retention and achievement. **These findings provide some support to calls to reduce bureaucracy and provide greater stability for teachers in colleges. In contrast, factors that were associated with a positive impact on retention and achievement, (support for students, teaching, personal tutoring and assessment and feedback) are not seen to have changed significantly. This is presumably because teachers recognise these factors as being an important part of their role over the whole of the 3-year period.** Both inferences are compatible, and are entirely consistent with the findings from the qualitative phase of the research, which are discussed in the second part of this report.

Responses by category of course/programme

The next stage of the analysis examined survey responses by the six categories of course from high baseline, improving to low baseline, declining. As expected, there were different responses from the different categories. Contrary to expectations, however, the differences were not very large. Indeed, few of the differences were significant at the 5% level. The most unexpected and counter-intuitive finding is that the responses that resemble each other most closely are from high baseline, improving courses and low baseline, declining courses. The views of respondents from these two categories of course can be described as the most 'optimistic' or 'positive'. At the other end of the spectrum, the views of staff from courses in the low baseline, improving and high baseline, declining categories also resemble each other.

Table 1 below gives the mean score for each of the 13 types of change given by respondents in different categories of course. **The changes that have the most positive impact on retention and achievement are as follows:**

- **context of your course**
- **assessment and feedback**
- **quality systems**
- **support for students**
- **teaching**
- **personal tutoring**

Table 1: Overall assessment of the impact of change factors, by category of course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Curriculum	3.05	3.09	3.01	2.93	3.15	2.99	3.04
Context of the course/programme	3.30	3.13	2.81	2.97	3.24	3.27	3.12
Assessment and feedback	3.25	3.07	3.16	3.05	3.08	3.15	3.13
Staffing	3.12	3.07	2.95	3.06	2.97	3.24	3.07
Quality systems	3.27	3.16	3.11	2.99	3.16	3.16	3.14
Resources	2.81	2.74	2.50	2.59	2.56	2.71	2.65
Student cohort	2.89	2.80	2.58	2.79	2.88	2.91	2.81
Support for students	3.23	3.23	3.16	3.03	3.24	3.26	3.19
Support for teachers	3.06	2.99	2.74	2.89	2.82	3.11	2.94
Teaching	3.19	3.15	3.00	2.99	3.11	3.08	3.09
Personal tutoring	3.08	3.27	3.11	3.01	3.24	3.37	3.18
Course/programme organisation and administration	3.08	2.94	2.67	2.87	3.06	3.06	2.95
Timetabling	3.01	2.85	2.86	2.93	2.92	3.12	2.95

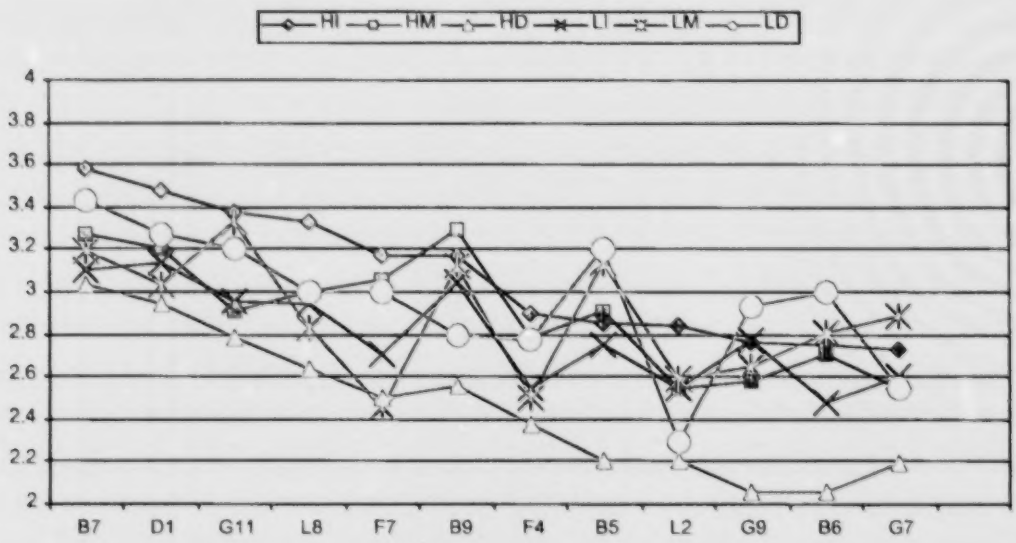
KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

This is broadly consistent with the more impressionistic, summative judgements made by respondents in the previous section of 'rates of change over the 3-year period'. Different patterns of response from different categories of course are also apparent. In general, the higher (so more optimistic or positive) ratings of change are from the high baseline, improving and the low baseline, declining courses. The lowest ratings are from the high baseline, declining and the low baseline, improving courses!

Similarities and differences in the responses from different categories of course can be seen even more clearly in Figure 1. Given that the responses which differed most were from high baseline, improving and high baseline, declining courses, the 12 items where the difference was greatest were plotted first. The corresponding responses from other categories of course were also plotted for further points of comparison.

Figure 1: How colleges improve



KEY:

B = Context of course/programme D = Staffing F = Resources
G = Student cohort L = Course/programme organisation and administration

B7	Whether experiments in your teaching are encouraged
D1	The membership of your course/programme team
G11	'Other' student cohort factor"
L8	'Other' course/programme organisation and administration factor
F7	'Other' resource factor
B9	'Other' context factor
F4	Availability of essential equipment for your course/programme
B5	Morale within your team
L2	Amount of course administration
G9	Financial problems of students
B6	Morale within your department or faculty

If the original hypotheses had been correct, the low baseline, improving responses would have been closer to the high baseline, improving and the low baseline, declining responses would have been most similar to those from high baseline, declining courses. As the figure makes clear, this is not the case. With the notable exception of views of changes to the amount of course administration, responses from low baseline, declining courses are quite similar to those from high baseline, improving courses. Conversely, across most of the items, the responses from *low baseline, improving courses* are quite similar to those from *high baseline, declining courses*. These findings demand further analysis and provide the focus for the qualitative phase of the research, which is discussed in Part 2.

The changes with the most negative impact on retention and achievement are:

- **resources**
- **student cohort**
- **support for teachers**
- **course organisation and administration**
- **timetabling.**

The four changes associated with the least positive/most negative impact broadly match the changes identified more impressionistically in the response to the final, summative question in the survey. Table 1 also shows the fairly small differences separating the different categories of course. Four types of change are rated particularly negatively by respondents from high baseline, declining courses:

- course context
- student cohort
- support for teachers
- course organisation and administration.

Changes to resources are rated most negatively by respondents from all categories of course. Respondents from high baseline, improving courses, however, made the least negative assessment of the impact of changes to resources. The most **positive** judgement concerning any changes made by respondents in the low baseline, **declining** category, is in respect of personal tutoring.

Findings for specific change factors

Curriculum

Curriculum changes that were rated most positively were:

- **scheme of work**
- **the way in which the schemes of work are introduced to students**
- **tutoring arrangements.**

Curriculum changes that were rated least positively were:

- **degree of difficulty of the course**
- **arrangements for key skills.**

High baseline, improving courses were particularly positive about changes to the scheme of work and the way in which schemes of work were introduced to students. The sorts of change in schemes of work which were identified by high baseline, improving courses as having a particularly positive impact include:

- the inclusion of a personal learning journal
- a large number of enrichment opportunities
- wider choice in option modules
- the introduction of exams at the end of the first year
- replacement of 6-week modules by shorter 3-week modules.

Table 2 below shows the assessment of the impact of different aspects of curriculum change, by different categories of course.

Table 2: Mean ratings for curriculum factors, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Course/syllabus content	3.05	3.02	3.00	2.81	3.27	3.14	3.05
Course/programme structure	2.95	3.17	3.12	2.87	3.11	3.13	3.06
Degree of difficulty of course/programme for students	2.67	2.90	2.78	2.87	2.88	3.21	2.89
Awarding body	3.05	3.13	2.97	2.96	3.12	3.00	3.04
Scheme of work	3.38	3.06	3.21	3.08	3.12	3.08	3.16
Way in which scheme introduced to students	3.36	3.17	3.18	3.12	3.33	3.00	3.19
Amount of enrichment linked to course/programme	3.15	3.22	3.06	3.08	3.27	2.80	3.10
Amount of enrichment not linked to course/programme	2.90	3.09	2.84	2.96	2.86	3.14	2.97
Tutoring arrangements	3.15	3.23	3.21	3.06	3.08	3.07	3.13
Arrangements for key skills	2.80	3.00	2.77	2.67	3.26	2.53	2.84
Any other curriculum factor	3.11	2.95	3.00	2.75	3.36	2.82	3.00

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining

LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Low baseline, improving courses were least positive about changes to course content and 'other curriculum factors'. 'Other curriculum factors' in this context include:

- the centralisation of timetabling
- excessive student workload
- reduction in course hours
- the tension between 5-year registrations with an awarding body and the need for students to complete portfolios within the 2 years of their course.

Low baseline, declining courses rated curriculum changes less positively than they did other sorts of changes and were least positive about the impact of changes to the amount of enrichment linked to course programme and arrangements for key skills. Typical comments included:

> *Students were entered for key skills for the last 2 years, which has added extra hours to their timetable (and required) and extra work for them to complete.*

> *There has been lack of support ... as the vocational staff are now having to deliver, assess and record all the key skill areas (note: key skills are a good idea, but should be course specific).*

Context of courses/programmes

Changes to course context which were rated *most* positively were:

- **the emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning**
- **how successes are dealt with by the team leader**
- **how problems are dealt with by the team leader**
- **whether innovation in teaching is encouraged**
- **quality of internal communications within the teaching team.**

Course context changes that were rated *least* positively were:

- **morale within the team**
- **morale within the department or faculty.**

Table 3 below shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of changes to course context by different categories of course.

Table 3: Mean ratings for context of course/programme factors, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Quality of internal communications within your team	3.55	3.08	3.17	3.14	3.29	3.60	3.31
Clarity of what is expected of you by your line manager	3.33	3.06	2.91	2.92	3.21	3.13	3.09
How successes are dealt with by course leader	3.50	3.23	3.09	3.06	3.56	3.38	3.30
How problems are dealt with by course leader	3.37	3.19	3.18	3.08	3.50	3.38	3.28
Morale within your team	2.85	2.91	2.21	2.75	3.14	3.21	2.85
Morale within your department or faculty	2.75	2.70	2.06	2.48	2.81	3.00	2.63
Whether innovation in your teaching is encouraged	3.58	3.27	3.03	3.10	3.19	3.43	3.27
Emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning	3.60	3.44	3.12	3.14	3.37	3.50	3.36
Any other context factor	3.17	3.29	2.56	3.05	3.13	2.80	3.00

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

The least positive assessment of the impact of changes to the course context was made by the high baseline, declining courses which also made the most negative assessment of the impact of changes to morale and 'other context factors'. 'Other course context factors' identified by high baseline, declining courses include:

- lack of staff development
- (poor) availability of equipment and accommodation
- staffing levels
- deterioration in resourcing
- fear of closure/redundancy.

The flavour of the pessimism concerning changes to course context among teachers on high baseline, declining courses, can be conveyed by the following comments:

> *College morale has been severely damaged, due to restructuring; this has communicated itself to students, who have been made uncertain of the future.*
>
> *Morale within the department is very low. No communication or very little, is encouraged.*
>
> *It is depressing for my staff to be working in a service which is in constant decline, in terms of conditions and ever-escalating demands.*

New or weaker members of teams [are] scorned, or meetings held when they cannot easily attend, or they are not informed.

The most positive assessments of changes to course context were made by the high baseline, improving and low baseline, declining courses. The sorts of course context changes with the most positive impact were identified as:

- recognition and appreciation of success
- encouragement by the head of centre
- consistency within the team
- change of course team leader
- new monitoring procedures
- more regular team meetings.

Open-ended comments from high baseline, improving course team members include:

Success is much more recognised and appreciated.

Innovation in teaching is always encouraged by the head of centre.

Morale has dropped because of changes in college structure, but students have not suffered'.

The course context change which was identified by respondents from high baseline, improving courses as having the most beneficial impact on retention and achievement was the emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning. Among the changes to course context, emphasis was placed on improving teaching, and respondents from *all* categories viewed learning most optimistically.

Assessment and feedback

Changes to assessment and feedback factors that were rated *most* positively were:

- **helpfulness of feedback to students**
- **students' understanding of assessment**
- **methods of assessment**
- **other assessment/feedback factors.**

The sorts of other changes to assessment/feedback which were identified as having a beneficial effect on retention and achievement include:

- greater clarity concerning standards of assessment

- standardisation of assignment briefs
- greater staff familiarity with assessment tasks
- introduction of a pilot feedback form for use by teachers.

Some of the evidence is rather ambiguous. Most of the 'other' assessment factors identified tend to have a negative impact. These include:

- lack of clear policies for coursework deadlines
- excessive workload on teachers
- few assessors
- delays in returning work to students
- increases in (staff) workload.

There were no changes to assessment and feedback factors that were rated particularly negatively. The most positive evaluations overall of the impact of changes to assessment and feedback were made by high baseline, improving and low baseline, declining courses. Examples of particularly positive changes included:

- improvements to assessment methods after a lecturer became an examiner for one of the modules
- noticeboard displays of work due by the end of each half-term
- provision of feedback on test papers to students
- use of standard feedback sheets for all written work by students.

Table 4 below shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of changes to assessment and feedback, by different categories of course.

Table 4: Mean ratings for assessment and feedback factors, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Students' understanding of assessment	3.38	3.03	3.18	3.10	3.32	3.09	3.18
Amount of assessment	3.15	2.75	3.06	2.92	3.08	2.92	2.98
Methods of assessment	3.33	3.16	3.15	3.10	3.12	3.08	3.16
Scheduling of assessment	3.15	3.06	3.06	3.04	3.11	3.00	3.07
Policy on deadlines for handing work in	3.11	3.06	3.19	3.16	3.00	3.08	3.10
Amount of private study/homework	3.00	2.97	3.00	2.84	2.96	3.33	3.02
Helpfulness of feedback to students	3.45	3.48	3.38	3.20	3.25	3.33	3.35
Any other assessment/feedback factor	3.40	3.07	3.24	3.00	2.83	3.33	3.15

KEY:

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HM = High baseline, maintaining
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LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Staffing

The changes to staffing which were rated *most positively* were:

- **mix of skills in the team**
- **course/team leadership**
- **membership of the team.**

Staffing changes which were rated *most negatively* were:

- **any other staffing factor**
- **amount of staff absence**
- **senior curriculum leadership.**

'Other staffing factors' in this context include:

- a large influx of part-time staff
- increases in staff workload
- staff turnover leading to inconsistent practices and a lack of (student) confidence in some tutors
- large and unwieldy course teams
- difficulties in recruiting staff with the necessary experience and abilities.

The words of one respondent are quite representative of the sorts of views expressed:

> *Statistics show that where staff are ill for long periods without adequate cover, morale and work suffer amongst students. A high percentage of part-time staff find it difficult to fully integrate into workings of department.*

The general picture that emerges from views of changes to staffing is of a rather beleaguered profession, which is confident about its crucial contribution to retention and achievement, but beset by difficulties. The spectrum of views from the most to the least optimistic can be illustrated by the following comments:

> *Very skilled, well-qualified teachers are able to stretch higher ability students [leading to] better further maths results.*

> *Stability of science team and a single tutor for students improved communication between staff and students.*

One member of staff was replaced by someone with more energy and enthusiasm and [....] this made an impact on the interest level of the students.

Considerable problems due to unsuitable staff, long-term sickness of one member and redundancy of another.

All the staff are now part-time. There is no day when we are all in. Communication is not straightforward. Second years [...] have no one to pull their grades together.

Table 5 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of staffing change, by different categories of course.

Table 5: Mean ratings for staffing, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Membership of your course/programme team	3.48	3.21	2.94	3.14	3.03	3.27	3.18
Mix of skills in your course/programme team	3.57	3.29	3.09	3.14	3.33	3.13	3.26
Your course/programme team leadership	3.33	3.28	3.13	3.16	3.41	3.29	3.27
Ratio of full- to part-time teachers in your course team	2.90	3.00	2.94	3.10	2.83	3.00	2.96
Amount of staff absence in your team	2.95	2.95	2.88	2.86	2.75	3.29	2.95
Your department/faculty headship	3.05	2.85	3.07	3.02	2.85	3.36	3.03
Senior curriculum leadership in your college	2.86	2.95	2.81	2.94	2.82	3.29	2.95
Composition of the group of personal tutors who tutor your students	2.94	3.13	3.03	3.21	3.07	3.27	3.11
Any other staffing factor	3.00	2.95	2.64	2.94	2.64	3.25	2.90

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Quality systems

The only change to quality systems which was rated negatively was:

- **availability of information from management information systems (MIS).**

The change to quality systems that was rated most positively was:

- **the use you make of feedback from students.**

Low baseline, declining courses gave a particularly negative evaluation of the impact of the availability of information from MIS. There was a statistically significant difference (at the 5% level) between the response of high baseline, maintenance courses and low baseline, improving courses, in respect of changes to observation of teaching and learning. Positive comments made by high baseline, maintenance courses included:

> *...much more observation of teaching...significant positive impact on teaching – some part-time staff identified as requiring further training and advice...*
>
> *Teaching observations are completed annually and I personally feel this has a positive impact on the teaching methods within the college and the department.*

In contrast, one respondent from a low baseline, improving course noted the 'introduction of a failed system for classroom observations'. Another remarked that 'increased "inspection" for senior lecturers has a demotivating effect – nothing positive is achieved by it'.

Table 6 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to quality systems, by different categories of course.

Table 6: Mean ratings for quality systems, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Self-assessment process for your course/programme	3.25	3.15	3.09	3.08	3.31	3.07	3.16
Availability of information from MIS	3.40	2.92	2.97	2.88	3.19	2.77	3.02
Observation of teaching and learning	3.30	3.30	3.29	2.94	3.11	3.13	3.18
Observation of tutoring	3.17	3.19	3.12	2.86	3.14	3.14	3.10
Processes for generating feedback from students	3.10	3.20	3.25	3.08	3.18	3.21	3.17
Use you make of feedback from students	3.37	3.37	3.33	3.12	3.28	3.36	3.31
Ways that managers monitor performance on your course/programme	3.33	3.00	2.88	2.96	3.03	3.29	3.08
Any other quality systems factor	3.25	3.14	2.94	3.00	3.00	3.33	3.11

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Resources

All aspects of changes to resources were evaluated negatively. The most negative evaluation concern:

- **time you have available for preparation**
- **number of teaching hours you have**
- **availability of essential equipment**
- **availability of technical support and backup.**

Particularly negative evaluations were made concerning the time available for preparation and the number of teaching hours. Typical comments include:

> *limited time for getting lesson ready sometimes means fewer notes/materials prepared*
>
> *...time for lesson preparation work is reduced, due to teaching hours/other paperwork/administration. This reflects on the number of different courses (taught by individual teachers).*
>
> *I work 60/70 hours a week and still never seem to keep ahead.*

High baseline, declining courses made notably more negative evaluations than other categories of course in respect of time available for preparation and the availability of essential equipment. A selection of comments from such courses gives the impression of something approaching despair:

> *Do not feel I have enough time to prepare lessons to the best of my ability, due to mountains of repetitive paperwork.*
>
> *I'm working harder than ever, but am less prepared for all my lessons – students need good lessons.*
>
> *Changed job role has cut time available for preparation/marking. New contracts exacerbate a situation. Now teaching more hours (with 5 hours remission) than 5 years ago!*

Table 7 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to resources, by category of course.

Table 7: Mean ratings for resources, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Time you have available for preparation	2.43	2.33	2.18	2.36	2.35	2.46	2.35
Number of teaching hours you have	2.61	2.67	2.48	2.61	2.48	2.36	2.54
Number of different courses you teach on	2.86	2.73	2.64	2.65	2.88	2.62	2.73
Availability of essential equipment for your course/programme	2.90	2.78	2.38	2.55	2.50	2.77	2.65
Availability of technical support and back up	2.86	2.81	2.57	2.46	2.52	3.00	2.70
Accommodation for your course/programme	2.85	2.83	2.77	2.76	2.72	2.77	2.78
Any other resource factor	3.17	3.06	2.50	2.71	2.45	3.00	2.82

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Student cohort

All aspects of change to the student cohort were also evaluated negatively, with the exception of 'other factors'. The *least* negative evaluations concern changes to the clarity of personal/career goals of students and the proportion of students leaving for a job. The *most* negative evaluations were made in respect of changes in the:

- **amount of part-time work done by students**
- **financial problems of students**
- **personal/emotional/health problems of students**
- **learning skills of students**
- **ability of students.**

High baseline, declining courses made some of the *most negative* evaluations of changes to the student cohort, particularly in respect of:

- financial problems
- amount of part-time work
- personal/emotional/health problems.

Two comments from teachers on high baseline, declining courses are typical of the rather pessimistic assessment of the impact of changes to the student cohort:

Students come ill prepared for a course which demands a high degree of self-motivation, lateral thinking, commitment and determination. A significant shift from students with A-levels to GNVQ qualifications. Students seem to have far more problems, financial, emotional, health than a few years ago; these adversely affect attendance, motivation and the quality of materials that students are able to purchase, and consequently the quality of work they produce.

Overall, students are less motivated to complete prescriptive coursework. They do not find study easy and although they have the same number of [GCSE] points, they do not seem so academically able. Many more need learning support and spend a lot of free time at part-time work. Many more have personal problems than previously.

Table 8 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to the student cohort, by category of course.

Table 8: Mean ratings for student cohort, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Motivation of students on your course/programme	2.95	2.84	2.69	2.67	2.81	3.00	2.83
Ability of students	2.67	2.84	2.69	2.83	2.74	2.77	2.76
Qualifications of students at commencement of course/programme	2.90	2.89	2.74	2.85	2.69	2.85	2.82
Learning skills of students	2.70	2.81	2.60	2.77	2.79	2.75	2.74
Clarity of personal/career goals of students	3.00	3.02	2.97	2.83	2.96	3.00	2.96
Proportion of students leaving for a job	3.14	2.97	2.73	2.84	3.11	3.08	2.98
Amount of paid part-time work done by students	2.73	2.54	2.19	2.60	2.89	2.54	2.58
How near to college do students live	2.82	2.79	2.67	2.92	2.96	2.92	2.85
Financial problems of students	2.76	2.58	2.06	2.77	2.65	2.93	2.63
Personal/emotional/health problems of students	2.68	2.59	2.28	2.62	2.70	3.00	2.65
Any other student cohort factor	3.38	2.91	2.78	2.96	3.33	3.20	3.09

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Support for students

No changes associated with support for students were evaluated as having a negative impact. **The changes that were evaluated most positively were:**

- **amount of support available to 'at-risk' students**
- **counselling and guidance support available**
- **ways that students are encouraged to support each other**
- **integration of learning support.**

Some of the most positive evaluations were made by the low baseline, declining courses in respect of the involvement of parents of younger students, financial support available and counselling and guidance support available.

The comments provided by a number of respondents helped to illustrate those aspects of support for students that seemed to be most effective.

> *Interview process for student intake has improved considerably. This identifies students with difficulties/problems. Also, observations during induction have helped to highlight student problems.*
>
> *[support for students] has been affected favourably by the implementation of senior tutor [role], identified as being responsible of student support.*
>
> *Parents invited to parents' evenings; tutors phone/write to parents if student is a cause for concern. Introduction of [Educational Maintenance Allowance] EMA has helped students financially but some still struggle. More students keen to get help – those on EMA <u>have</u> to get help.*

Table 9 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to support for students, by category of course.

Table 9: Mean ratings for support for students, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Involvement of parents of younger students	2.89	3.11	3.17	3.04	3.00	3.31	3.09
Ways that students are encouraged to support each other	3.35	3.30	3.00	3.14	3.32	3.33	3.24
Financial support available	3.26	3.10	3.00	3.18	3.39	3.54	3.19
Counselling and guidance support available	3.42	3.27	3.23	3.06	3.31	3.46	3.25
Availability of staff to provide individual support when needed	3.10	3.34	3.23	2.86	3.26	3.23	3.17
Take-up of learning support by students	3.15	3.15	3.37	2.84	3.21	2.92	3.11
Integration of learning support within your course/programme	3.14	3.31	3.27	3.04	3.41	3.07	3.21
Length of time it takes to identify 'at-risk' students	3.50	3.11	3.16	3.02	3.30	3.29	3.23
Amount of support available for 'at-risk' students	3.40	3.31	3.24	3.10	3.33	3.29	3.28
Methods of acknowledging/rewarding student progress	3.35	3.14	3.28	3.10	3.04	3.23	3.19
Any other support for students factor	3.00	3.36	2.82	2.94	3.11	3.17	3.07

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Support for teachers

No aspects of changes to support for teachers were evaluated as having a particularly positive impact on student retention and achievement Changes to support for teachers that were evaluated particularly negatively were:

- **mechanisms to acknowledge/reward effective teaching**
- **support available for you from within the college**
- **administrative/clerical support.**

Some of the most negative evaluations were made by respondents from high baseline, declining courses, about:

- support available to you from within your college
- mechanisms to acknowledge/reward effective teaching
- support available to you from within your team.

Even at their most positive, teachers on high baseline, declining courses appear to feel unsupported and under-valued. At their most negative, they feel undermined and even disparaged. This range of views can be illustrated by the following comments from the questionnaires:

> *The college staff do their best to offer support under difficult conditions, ie short staffing in areas such as counselling or administration.*
>
> *Support is just about non-existent!!*
>
> *I don't feel supported by central management – I feel disparaged. In many ways, they convey [the view] that we are not valued.*
>
> *I feel that any initiative or something slightly out of the norm is seen as a problem administrators cannot cope with!*
>
> *Support is subject to various interpretations. It is present if you tow the line and do not put forward new ideas.*

The most positive evaluation of any aspect of support for teachers was made by low baseline, declining courses in respect of support available to you from within your team. The most favourable evaluations overall of changes to support for teachers were made by low baseline, declining courses and high baseline, improving courses.

Without wanting to push the interpretation too far, something different seems to be happening in different categories of course. A decline in performance in the high baseline courses seems to be associated with some disruption in relationships, either within the team or between the team and the college. The relatively high rating for team

support among teachers on low baseline, declining courses may perhaps indicate that such teams support each other in diversity. The positive (but not strongly positive) evaluations of team and departmental support from high baseline, improving courses may indicate that members of such teams either take their team support for granted, or, alternatively that they are less dependent on it.

These assessments of the impact of changes to support for teachers have some quite worrying implications for college leadership. It is, perhaps, natural and unsurprising that teachers should have the most positive view of support from their teaching teams. It is, however, rather alarming that they should have negative views of the impact of changes to support available from their college, or from mechanisms to acknowledge and reward effective teaching.

Table 10 shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to support for teachers, by category of course.

Table 10: Mean ratings for support for teachers, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Support available to you from within your team	3.05	3.14	2.79	3.30	3.15	3.50	3.16
Support available to you from within dept or faculty	3.14	3.03	2.83	3.08	2.79	3.17	3.01
Support available to you from college	2.90	2.84	2.52	2.68	2.89	2.92	2.79
Mechanisms to acknowledge/reward effective teaching	2.90	2.72	2.52	2.68	2.77	2.92	2.75
Opportunities available for staff development	3.29	3.12	2.88	2.90	3.13	3.31	3.11
Administrative/clerical support	3.00	2.98	2.77	2.74	2.69	2.93	2.85
Any other support for teachers factor	3.17	3.07	2.90	2.83	2.30	3.00	2.88

KEY:

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LD = Low baseline, declining

Teaching

Changes to aspects of teaching which were said to have the most positive impact on student outcomes were:

- **variety of teaching strategies**
- **ways you monitor individual student progress**
- **induction processes.**

The change said to have the most negative effect, was to the amount of teaching time for work with individual students.

Table 11, below, shows the assessments of the impact of different aspects of change to teaching, by category of course.

Table 11: Mean ratings for teaching, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Your role as a teacher	3.14	3.14	2.75	2.82	3.21	2.71	2.96
Recruitment and selection processes	3.23	3.22	3.13	3.18	3.00	3.29	3.18
Entry requirements/admissions policy	3.19	3.00	3.03	3.08	3.00	3.21	3.09
Induction processes	3.39	3.33	3.22	3.16	3.35	3.21	3.28
Ways you monitor individual student progress	3.48	3.32	3.33	3.10	3.45	3.46	3.36
Variety of teaching strategies you use	3.52	3.42	3.20	3.12	3.32	3.54	3.35
Amount of teaching time involving different tasks for lower (or higher) attaining students	3.20	3.14	2.73	2.94	2.89	2.86	2.96
Amount of teaching time available to work with individual students	2.70	2.75	2.45	2.62	3.00	2.79	2.72
Proportion of teaching time involving 'active learning' by students	3.19	3.17	3.07	2.98	3.25	2.86	3.09
Your involvement in development activity inside your college	3.10	3.02	3.13	2.96	3.07	3.00	3.05
Your involvement in profes.'onal activity outside the college	3.15	3.26	3.16	2.92	3.04	2.79	3.05
Any other teaching factor	3.00	3.00	2.80	3.00	2.78	3.25	2.97

KEY:

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LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

The free text comments from the questionnaires add considerably to this rather bare analysis. It is clear, from a number of such comments, that changes to recruitment/selection and induction processes are generally reviewed as having a positive effect. Further, a number of teachers convey a sense of satisfaction and pride in their professional development and, indeed, advancement. These are viewed as having helped teachers better to assist their students:

> *The contribution to developing activity, both inside college and the opportunity to develop my own professional life outside, has had a positive impact on the course.*

> *Promotion to a management post means I feel I can be more helpful to students in my own right and I like to speak to groups of students I teach to discuss problems/positive issues.*

[Morale within my team] has changed dramatically: 3 years ago I was an instructor but now I am a full-time lecturer [and programme manager] […] after completing a Cert. Ed.

…1 year teaching experience in the USA has helped to improve teaching skills and techniques.

Involvement with exam/awarding body has had a significant positive impact.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, comments concerning the reduction of teaching time available to work with individual students resemble almost exactly the comments made on resources, discussed above.

Removal of workshop time has made it increasingly difficult to help students with individual problems.

Teaching time in the college is cut for this course annually. As a result, some of the weaker students will suffer or leave.

Size of teaching groups has increased, resulting in a more uniform approach to teaching strategies and less time for differentiation or individual support.

Less time for dealing with individual needs of students and similarly 'group work' involves whole course, and all are treated in a similar way. No time for applying teaching styles.

Spending too much time with weak students is throwing the group off balance and not enabling enough time for more able students.

Overall, the high baseline, improving courses evaluated changes to teaching most positively. At the other extreme, low baseline, improving courses were the least optimistic concerning the impact of changes to teaching.

Personal tutoring

All aspects of changes to personal tutoring were evaluated as having a generally positive impact on retention and achievement Changes to the aspects of tutoring which were rated most positively were:

- **any other personal tutoring factor**
- **the role of the personal tutor**
- **target-setting processes in personal tutorials**
- **review and action-planning processes in personal tutorials.**

Other personal tutoring factors in this context include:

- support for basic skills and special needs
- interaction with parents
- support for personal, social and emotional problems of students
- improved tutorial framework.

Typical positive comments from the questionnaires include:

> *Much more time allocated with much improved response [...] better reviewing of action plans during tutorials has improved tutorials and retention.*
>
> *Personal tutor extremely good in her role – very supportive yet realistic with students.*
>
> *The reviewing has been excellent and really is useful for target setting.*
>
> *Tutorial provision acts as safety net to retain students on the programme – they can be directed to suitable support.*
>
> *The personal tutor process has enabled issues to be resolved early – enhancing retention figures.*

Changes to tutoring were evaluated most positively by respondents from low baseline, declining courses. As we have seen, in relation to other change factors, high baseline, improving courses tended to give some of the most positive evaluations to other types of change. In relation to personal tutoring, however, they joined the low baseline, improving courses in evaluating changes to personal tutoring in a fairly neutral way.

The main limiting factor associated with personal tutoring is lack of sufficient time. Where personal tutoring attracts negative assessments, this is invariably associated with this problem, or (more rarely) with an inappropriate focus on paperwork and administration. The following comments are fairly typical:

> *The key issue here is the amount of <u>time</u> [...] Other issues, such as increased teaching load, are significant here.*
>
> *The role [of personal tutor] remains <u>very</u> important. The crap that goes with it (such as target setting, action planning, etc) puts students off and gets in the way of 'proper tutoring'. Let us be effective front-line tutors! Why is everything so paper-bound?*

Table 12 shows the assessments of the impact of aspects of change to personal tutoring, by category of course.

Table 12: Mean ratings for personal tutoring (on this course/programme), according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Role of the personal tutor	3.00	3.30	3.10	3.02	3.54	3.36	3.22
Amount of time students have for one-to-one tutorials	2.86	3.15	3.07	2.87	3.16	3.43	3.09
Amount of time students have for group tutorials	3.05	3.21	2.94	2.92	3.15	3.36	3.11
Target setting processes in personal tutorials	3.14	3.26	3.27	3.10	3.19	3.36	3.22
Review and action-planning processes in personal tutorials	3.05	3.27	3.30	3.08	3.23	3.36	3.22
Any other personal tutoring factor	3.38	3.43	3.00	3.06	3.18	3.33	3.23

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Course organisation and administration

Overall, changes to course organisation and administration were not seen as having a particularly positive impact. The change that was evaluated *most positively* was the ways you monitor and record student progress. The changes that were rated most *negatively* were the amount of course administration and time available for team meetings. It is interesting to note that the high baseline, improving courses gave the most positive assessment of changes to course organisation and administration. Qualitative comments from their questionnaires included the following:

> *Course administration has greatly increased, however it has been beneficial to us.*
>
> *Shared learning of effective delivery of course, [and] recording student progress has had a positive impact.*

Table 13 shows the assessments of the impact of different changes to course administration and organisation, by category of course.

Table 13: Mean ratings for course/programme organisation and administration, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Ways you monitor and record student progress	3.26	3.27	3.06	3.14	3.50	3.15	3.23
Amount of course administration	2.84	2.55	2.21	2.55	2.59	2.29	2.51
Time available for team meetings	2.71	2.56	2.30	2.62	2.93	3.00	2.69
Effectiveness of team meetings	3.11	2.92	2.70	2.82	3.12	3.13	2.97
Team use of shared learning materials	3.17	3.18	2.97	3.02	3.19	3.38	3.15
Team involvement in planning all aspects of course	3.21	3.12	2.81	2.96	3.31	3.36	3.13
Amount of team teaching	3.00	2.95	2.69	2.87	3.00	3.15	2.94
Any other course/programme organisation and administration factor	3.33	3.00	2.64	2.94	2.83	3.00	2.96

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Timetabling

With some exceptions, changes to timetabling were seen to have a negative impact on student outcomes. The changes that were evaluated as having the most negative effect were:

- **hours within which the courses were taught each day**
- **amount of gaps in the timetable**
- **amount of timetabled private study by students**
- **amount of time on the timetable for students to 'catch up'.**

In respect of four of the six aspects of changes to timetabling, and in respect of the overall assessment of changes to timetabling, respondents from low baseline, declining courses gave the most optimistic assessment of their impact on retention and achievement.

Table 14, below, shows the assessments of the impact of aspects of change to timetabling, by category of course.

Table 14: Mean ratings for timetabling, according to course

	HI	HM	HD	LI	LM	LD	Overall
Hours within which the course/programme is taught each day	2.90	2.97	2.83	2.94	2.79	2.73	2.86
Amount of gaps in timetable	2.85	2.72	2.74	2.98	2.97	3.27	2.92
Number of weeks the course is taught over the year	3.16	2.95	3.10	2.94	2.97	2.86	3.00
Amount of timetabled private study time for students	3.00	2.85	2.79	2.91	2.87	3.14	2.93
Amount of time on timetable for students to 'catch up'	2.95	2.80	2.83	2.85	3.14	3.21	2.96
Any other timetabling factor	3.17	2.79	2.86	2.94	2.78	3.50	3.01

KEY:

HI = High baseline, improving
HM = High baseline, maintaining
HD = High baseline, declining
LI = Low baseline, improving
LM = Low baseline, maintaining
LD = Low baseline, declining

Discussion: comparisons between categories of course

High baseline courses

Respondents from high baseline courses seem to make broadly similar assessments of the sort of changes that have the most positive and most negative impact on student outcomes. As originally anticipated, the aspects of the student experience which are most closely controlled and influenced by teachers (innovation, team skills, emphasis on improving teaching and learning), are seen as having broadly positive impacts. Aspects that are not controlled by teachers (student characteristics, morale within the department, the degree of difficulty of the course) are seen as having largely negative impacts on retention and achievement. In addition, changes to factors which have the effect of constraining or reducing the ability of teachers to teach effectively (time for preparation, amount of course administration, number of teaching hours) are seen as reducing achievement and retention rates.

A further aspect of the data is striking and corresponds with our initial hypotheses. Respondents from high baseline, improving courses are the most positive about positive changes, eg emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning and the least negative about changes with broadly negative impacts, eg time you have for preparation. The opposite is true for the respondents from high baseline, declining courses who are least positive about the changes with positive impacts, eg helpfulness of feedback to students and most negative about changes with negative impacts, eg

morale within your department or faculty. Responses from high baseline courses which are maintaining their retention and achievement rates fall somewhere between the two. This point can be demonstrated by reference back to the overall evaluations of different change factors and to the fairly consistent gap in responses from improving and declining, high baseline courses (see pages19–37).

The same point can be demonstrated in a different way. The five most positive and the five most negative scores for any aspect of change are listed below, along with the mean score for each item. The high baseline, improving courses (ie the most positive) gave the highest scores for the most positive items and also the highest (ie the least negative) scores for the items that were seen as having the most adverse effect on retention and achievement. At the other end of the spectrum, high baseline, declining courses gave the most pessimistic (ie lowest) assessments; high baseline courses, which were maintaining their success rates were somewhere in between.

There is an indication, moreover, that respondents from high baseline, improving courses are particularly positive about the emphasis on improving teaching and learning, the encouragement of innovation and some aspects of the ways in which their teaching teams function.

High baseline, improving courses

The changes which respondents from high baseline, improving courses viewed most positively are listed below. The figures in brackets give the mean score:

- emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning (3.60)
- whether innovation in teaching is encouraged (3.58)
- mix of skills in your course team (3.57)
- quality of internal communications in your team (3.55)
- variety of teaching strategies you use (3.52).

The changes that are seen to have the most negative impact on retention and achievement are:

- time you have available for preparation (2.43)
- number of teaching hours you have (2.61)
- ability of students (2.67)
- degree of difficulty of the course for students (2.67)
- personal/emotional/health problems of students (2.68).

High baseline, maintaining courses

The changes that respondents from high baseline, maintaining courses identified as having the most beneficial impact are:

- helpfulness of feedback to students (3.48)
- emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning (3.44)
- other personal tutoring factors (3.43)
- variety of teaching strategies you use (3.42)
- use you make of feedback from students (3.37).

The changes that the same respondents said had the most negative impact are:

- time you have available for preparation (2.33)
- amount of paid part-time work done by students (2.54)
- amount of course administration (2.55)
- time available for team meetings (2.56)
- financial problems of students (2.58).

High baseline, declining courses

The changes with the most positive impact on retention and achievement according to respondents from high baseline, declining courses are:

- helpfulness of feedback to students (3.38)
- take up of learning support by students (3.37)
- use you make of feedback from students (3.33)
- ways you monitor individual student progress (3.33)
- review and action-planning processes in personal tutorials (3.30).

The changes with the most negative impact, according to respondents from high baseline, declining courses are:

- morale within your department or faculty (2.06)
- financial problems of students (2.06)
- time you have available for preparation (2.18)
- amount of part-time work done by students (2.19)
- amount of course administration (2.21).

Low baseline courses

The most surprising feature of the low baseline courses is that respondents from low baseline, *improving* courses are much less positive than respondents from courses that have only maintained their success rates and respondents from low baseline courses whose success rates have actually deteriorated. In the 13 sections of the survey, they gave the least or the next least optimistic assessment of the impact of changes in nine categories. Their 'pessimism' was exceeded only by respondents from high baseline, declining courses who gave the least or the next to least optimistic evaluation of the impact of 11 categories of change. This point is worth emphasising in a different way. What distinguishes *improving* low baseline courses is their relative *pessimism* concerning the impact of changes that are regarded as having a beneficial impact on retention and achievement. Their evaluation of the impact of changes that are generally regarded as negative is not markedly different from that of other categories of course.

The second surprising feature of this data is that respondents from low baseline courses with declining success rates seem to have a view of positive change factors which does not readily accord with data concerning trends and success rates on their own courses. Thus, respondents from low baseline, *declining* courses are noticeably more positive in their assessment of change factors with a generally favourable impact on achievement and retention than respondents from low baseline *improving* courses. Indeed, their assessments quite closely resemble the assessments made by the high baseline, improving courses. In the 13 categories of change, respondents from low baseline, declining courses gave the most or next most optimistic evaluation of eight categories. This general observation can be illustrated by reference to the scores given by different categories of low baseline courses to the most positive and most negative change factors. The scores for the most negative factors are quite similar between the different categories of low baseline courses. The scores for the most positive factors, however, are higher from the low baseline maintaining or declining courses and paradoxically, *lower* from the low baseline, improving courses.

Low baseline, improving courses

The changes which respondents from low baseline, improving courses viewed most positively are listed below:

- support available to you from within your team (3.30)
- composition of the group of personal tutors who tutor your students (3.21)
- helpfulness of feedback to students (3.20)
- recruitment and selection processes (3.18)
- financial support available (3.18).

The changes that are assessed as having the most negative impact are listed below:

- time you have available for preparation (2.36)
- availability of technical support and backup (2.46)
- morale within your department or faculty (2.48)
- availability of essential equipment (2.55)
- amount of course administration (2.55).

Low baseline, maintenance courses

The changes seen most positively by respondents from low baseline courses whose success rates were maintained are:

- how successes are dealt with by your course leader (3.56)
- the role of the personal tutor (3.54)
- how problems are dealt with by your course leader (3.50)
- ways you monitor and record student progress (3.50)
- ways you monitor individual student progress (3.45).

The changes that the same respondents evaluated as having the most negative impact on retention and achievement are all related to resources:

- any other support for teachers (2.30)
- time you have available for preparation (2.35)
- any other resource factor (2.45)
- number of teaching hours you have (2.48)
- availability of essential equipment (2.50).

Low baseline, declining courses

Contrary to expectation, respondents from courses with a low baseline and declining success rates evaluated a number of strategies as having a *strong positive* impact on retention and achievement. The changes whose impact was assessed most positively are:

- quality of internal communications in your team (3.60)
- financial support available to students (3.54)
- variety of teaching strategies you use (3.54)
- emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning (3.50)
- support available to you from within your team (3.50).

The changes said to have the most negative impact are:

- amount of course administration (2.29)
- number of teaching hours you have (2.36)
- time available for preparation (2.46)
- arrangements for key skills (2.53)
- amount of paid part-time work done by students (2.54).

Summary

The biggest surprise from the quantitative phase of this research was the relatively *small* difference in views expressed between the different categories of course. Not only were the differences fairly small, but they tended not be statistically significant, at the 5% and even at the 10% level. This implies a certain shared professional outlook across this relatively large, diverse and structured sample of experienced teachers, tutors and course team leaders.

Factors that are seen as having a positive effect on student retention and achievement rates are mainly those factors that teachers can control or influence:

- support for students
- quality systems
- personal tutoring
- assessment and feedback
- context of your course
- teaching.

Factors that are seen as having an adverse impact on student retention and achievement are also identified as those factors which changed most significantly over the 3-year period. These are, generally, factors over which teachers have least influence or control:

- resources
- student cohort
- support for teachers
- course organisation or administration
- timetabling.

A second finding is that the most marked differences between the responses from the different categories of course were manifested in the responses from high baseline, improving and high baseline, declining courses. The former were most positive about the factors that teachers control and least negative about the factors which lay outside teachers' control. The latter were least positive/most negative about both. This finding largely accords with the original hypotheses.

The third finding was, to say the least, counter-intuitive. Respondents from *low baseline, declining courses* tended to express views that were quite similar to those expressed by teachers from the high baseline, improving courses. Conversely, the views of teachers on *low baseline, improving courses* seemed to be quite pessimistic, particularly where their views are compared with the views of respondents from courses with the same low baseline, but which had actually declined over the 3-year period.

Various hypotheses were suggested in Steering Group discussions. Perhaps the teachers on these low baseline, declining programmes were not fully aware of their data? Could their data be wrong? Were teachers comparing their performance to some sort of norm for their particular subject or programme area, rather than the college norm? Did teachers on low baseline, declining courses feel vulnerable and did this colour the way that they completed questionnaires? In other words, did they give the answers which they thought might be expected of them, rather than the answers which represented their honest views. In any event, the second phase of the research sought to answer these questions, to clarify the questionnaire responses, to gather further information and, above all, to clarify understandings and interpretations of the survey phase of this research.

PART 2: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Introduction

The interviews were conducted between September and December 2001. There were interviews with 59 of the original respondents. For the most part, interviews were conducted individually; on two occasions, teachers from the same programme chose to be interviewed together. Further information concerning the interview methods is contained in Appendix 2.

A slightly different version of Part 2 of this research is being published as a stand-alone publication (Maynard and Martinez 2002). For ease of reference, the structure of Part 2 of the report is similar to that in Part 1. Some overall conclusions are drawn at the end of the report.

Overall findings

Teachers interviewed had strong views about which factors most affected retention and achievement, although these were sometimes contradictory and required further clarification. For example, teams with the highest retention and achievement often claimed that negative factors were affecting their courses when, statistically, retention and achievement had remained consistently high for several years. Conversely, many teachers on courses with low retention and achievement claimed that students left because of economic or social circumstances, although courses with high retention and achievement existed in their colleges and recruited a similar student cohort.

Overall, the interviews demonstrated that the original hypotheses are broadly correct: teachers in improving courses largely attribute improvements to their own agency and teachers in courses with low retention and achievement largely attribute their position to factors over which they have little or no control. That said, it also became clear that staff on courses with the highest retention and achievement brought to their courses some specific attitudes, aptitudes and strategies that contributed significantly to their success. These seem to contribute to what we might term effective teaching.

Conversely, staff in courses with the lowest retention and achievement appear to have brought to their courses specific attitudes and behaviours that contributed significantly to a failure to retain students or to improve success rates. This does not necessarily mean that staff on lower baseline courses believed themselves to be any the less effective as teachers, since they rarely associated relatively poor retention and achievement with their teaching.

The case is different again when courses with previously high retention and achievement go into decline. This was associated with a loss of confidence among teachers in their ability to manage their courses effectively. Indeed, we have already

seen from the survey that teachers on such courses gave the **least optimistic** assessments of the impact of different changes on the success of their students.

When courses with low retention and achievement improved, it was usually because the teachers began to adopt strategies and processes they believed to be responsible for contributing to improved retention and achievement on other courses in their department or college. This sometimes occurred because of a change in team leadership or college senior management, but more often came about because the team accepted that a new strategy or process seen to be effective elsewhere could be equally effective for them.

Although effective teachers adopted a number of different strategies that clearly affected retention and achievement, it is impossible either to produce a checklist or to isolate one process as more effective than another. Nor is there much value in trying to determine which positive factors outweighed which negative ones. There is some evidence, however, suggesting that effective teachers, both as individuals and team members, are strongly on the side of students – regardless of programme level – and dedicated to student success.

The questions in this section asked teachers to rate the impact of curriculum-related issues like course content, level and scheme of work on student retention and achievement. They were also able to say whether they thought that issues like enrichment, tutoring arrangements and key skills were positive or negative factors.

Teachers on courses with the highest retention and achievement rates saw the curriculum as an important element in student retention and achievement and believed in the systematic preparation of student-centred schemes of work which are interesting and stimulating, but do not involve any 'dumbing down'. Their view was that teachers should not only understand individual student motivation for taking the course but also the need to maintain that motivation throughout the programme. Courses with high retention and achievement included a strong practical element (for both academic and non-academic courses) and addressed literacy/numeracy support needs at an early stage. Responses about key skills, however, were ambivalent. Some teachers saw them as a valuable initiative, others did not. Generally speaking, teams thought it more important to plan enrichment activities that complemented the main course (including outside speakers, residentials, etc) and to ensure that all students are tracked and supported throughout their programmes .

> *Traditionally, when I came here 4 years ago the retention rate for Computing was poor, so one of the things I was keen to do was to actually address that by offering ICT [information and communications technology] as an alternative, because it had a strong user focus and was more relevant to student needs.*

Teachers of courses/programmes with a low baseline and declining retention and achievement appeared either to be complacent about the curriculum or to assume no

changes were necessary. Some of those whose courses were most in decline, confessed to having no schemes of work and/or no enrichment. On one course students were not given handouts because they were expected to buy their own books, even though many chose not to do so. On another course, the students had been labelled as 'not interested in the curriculum anyway'.

Teachers on courses that had had a high baseline in retention and achievement, but were now declining had begun to adopt some of the attitudes displayed by teachers on low baseline courses. They accepted that their courses were becoming 'bog standard' or out of touch with both student needs and the needs of industry, but felt unable to do anything about it. This loss of faith in the quality of their own curriculum led to some conveying their uncertainty and negativity to their students, while others admitted taking on students who were not recruited with integrity. Such students found struggling with academic concepts increasingly difficult and teachers felt that they had insufficient time to cover topics in the detail that these students required.

Conversely, teachers on courses where retention and achievement were improving were adopting strategies similar to those with already high baselines. Through benchmarking and seeking support from external bodies and exam boards, teams had begun to plan more effectively, update content and add enrichment and interest. More attention was being paid to ensuring that entry qualifications matched the demands of the curriculum and that both the curriculum and student progress were reviewed systematically.

Findings for specific change factors

Context of the course/programme

Teachers were asked to assess the impact of direct line management and team morale on retention and achievement. They were also asked about the emphasis on improving teaching and learning and whether experiments with teaching were encouraged.

Respondents on courses with the highest retention and achievement were those who gave their fullest attention to teaching and learning, both as individual teachers and as members of a team. More importantly, effective teachers and effective teams proved to be relatively autonomous. In one highly successful college, a senior management team had fostered this autonomy with a strong commitment to improving teaching and learning. In other colleges, however, autonomous teams developed because practitioners sought to distance themselves from the aggressive management styles of individual senior managers or senior management teams perceived as being dictatorial and too far removed from what one teacher called, 'the real business of teaching and learning'. In one college a successful team had operated for a year without a section leader or head of department and was now running courses with high retention and achievement in an annexe some distance from the main campus and rarely visited by senior management.

All respondents saw teamwork as crucial to both effective teaching and student success. Effective teams consisted of experienced, qualified practitioners who were interested in student success and whose team meetings focused on comprehensive, detailed planning and delivery, sharing good practice in teaching and learning, and monitoring individual student progress. Effective teams had high morale, met regularly and resolved any differences between them at team meetings. They believed that students always knew if they were being taught by a happy and stable team and responded accordingly. They also believed a good team set sound ground rules for students and always tried to motivate and inspire them:

> *The team has been solid for several years. We all know what we're doing and the students have got the best tutor they could have for each particular part of their course.*

On low baseline courses, however, some respondents were either complacent about the course team or said that the team had grown stale or lost key members. Some teams did not meet or felt under pressure when they did so because they were constantly asked to respond to new management-led developments, not always connected with classroom practice. Several respondents admitted to being in a team whose members not only felt negative about all aspects of college work but conveyed these attitudes to students in class. As a member of a team with *high* retention and achievement put it:

> *Students are very clever; they soon find out if a teacher's bothered about them and – I probably shouldn't say it – but some teachers don't really care if their students pass or fail and don't feel accountable. Some teachers take the attitude, 'Oh no! I don't teach below advanced level, that's beneath me.'*

There appears to be a specific pattern to the decline in retention and achievement in courses/programmes which had started from a high baseline in 1996/7. Usually, one or more incident led to a lowering of individual or team morale. This might be triggered by increased workloads, team members becoming ill or absent or a general perception that line managers and senior management teams were paying less attention to teaching, learning and staff development. In one instance, a college manager refused to allow an annual end-of-year student art exhibition to continue on the grounds of 'health and safety', leaving the teacher involved feeling bitter and unappreciated.

By contrast, teachers whose courses began to improve retention and achievement from a low baseline started to demonstrate greater team autonomy. They became a more united, more close=knit group, developed a team philosophy and placed greater emphasis on teaching and learning. One team was enabled to do this through a new senior manager who supported staff and wanted to improve quality, but other teams developed a more autonomous way of working through their own initiative. Another

team started to introduce value added and absence reporting systems as a means of improving retention and achievement.

Providing effective assessment and feedback

Effective teachers who commented in detail about student assessment saw students as the focus of their work. There was a general view that students, 'need to feel they're achieving. If you work for them, they'll work for you'. Team members, therefore, saw assessment as a key part of improving student achievement, often emphasising that it was a two-way process in which the student has as much input as the teacher.

> *The team made things more manageable for the students so that it was clearer to them how much assessment they would face and when. Because they could see the structure better they were more encouraged.*

While it may be helpful for an institution or team to have an assessment policy, assessment handbooks and log books, effective teachers placed more emphasis on students having a clear understanding of how they are assessed and the criteria they are being assessed against. There was a strong view expressed by several respondents that assessment should be scheduled and manageable with a particular emphasis on assessment early in the course, so that students can understand the assessment criteria and apply their understanding to improve their work. It was also felt important that students should experience early success and be given both detailed, constructive feedback and individual support to improve. When students had confidence in their ability to achieve, they could then be encouraged to do more of their own research and adopt a more reflective approach to their learning.

It was interesting to note that courses with the highest retention and achievement had teachers who were sensitive to the demands assessment makes on students and the need to make assessment tasks more comprehensible and achievable, but without losing any rigour. One team ensured that on a low-level practical course, assessment was as skill-based and as non-threatening as possible. Another team used innovative course-builder software to set up assessments on the college's intranet. One respondent also pointed out that teachers need to be aware that college assessment schedules and processes:

> *...do not always take account of the fact that a student's personal problems can, on occasions, interfere with their work and that it is no good putting them under pressure to achieve without resolving the problems. Pressure to get students to complete assignments when they are experiencing major personal problems is [more] liable to facilitate drop-out than aid retention.*

Teachers on courses with low baselines for retention and achievement saw assessment and feedback as one of their least important priorities. They had either no view on the matter or felt the team knew what they were doing so there was not a problem. Two respondents, however, blamed the students, either for not understanding their assessment requirements in the first place or failing to complete assessments, 'because they [adult students] were trying to juggle too many commitments'. One teacher suggested that the reasons some students didn't hand work in was that they didn't *want* to achieve at that level, while another said that he always expected 25% of his students to drop out anyway.

Teachers where high retention and achievement were declining attributed their problems to a mixture of factors both within and beyond their control. There was a view that staff did not always understand the assessment process themselves or that too much reliance was placed on giving students an assessment handbook and assuming that they would read it. One respondent felt that students had too much assessment, with too many assignments being required at the same time; another thought that assessment was becoming less rigorous and that, even then, the students were not up to the required assessment level. In one instance, staff imposed rigid deadlines and refused to accept student work after the required date. There was also a general complaint that students no longer did homework because they were too busy earning money in part-time employment.

On low baseline courses where retention and achievement were improving, teachers were beginning to adopt similar practices to teachers on high baseline courses. Care was being taken that students now understood the assessment process and evidence requirements, and efforts were being made, especially on lower level courses, to motivate students to achieve. One teacher was rewriting assignments to make them more interesting, humorous and relevant while another was introducing more support for basic skills.

Staffing

This part of the interviews asked for responses that would clarify both the role of the team and the mix of skills within the team or programme area. It also provided a second opportunity for respondents to clarify their views on departmental/faculty leadership and the role of senior curriculum leadership within the college. The interview outcomes were interesting in that the highest achieving teams emphasised again the importance of effective and autonomous teams and had little to say about line managers or senior managers.

Courses with high retention and achievement rates were usually taught by full-time staff whose subject/commercial knowledge was matched by their ability to teach. The course team was regarded as crucial, with particular emphasis placed on the need for individuals to have complementary skills and, in the case of vocational programmes, a strong industrial background. It is interesting to note that while a stable team enables detailed and comprehensive curriculum planning and updating to take place, effective

teams can also cope with staff turnover and increased use of part-time staff. This, again, appears to be linked with team autonomy since commitment to the team was seen as more important than commitment to the section manager or departmental head. What most teams had in common, however, was 'a commitment to do the best for students'.

Teachers on courses with low retention and achievement were the most aggrieved about their status and working conditions. They perceived they were doing all that they could in circumstances that were largely beyond their control. They stated that some problems were due to poor cover arrangements and others occurred because their colleges now employed too many part-time staff who knew very little about the education system or the students they were teaching. In one instance, teachers were so dissatisfied by senior management proposals for redundancies and restructuring that they conveyed their views to the students with the effect that all of them left the programme!

A similar malaise was found among respondents whose previously high retention and achievement rates were now in decline. These teachers perceived senior managers to be deliberately reducing team numbers and relying more and more on part-time staff to cover the gaps. This left specialist areas covered inadequately or forced the team to 'cobble together missing elements of expertise'. In one instance, a teacher's enthusiasm began to wane because of a feeling that, 'all new ideas are scotched'. Others attributed declining retention and achievement to senior managers' inability to respond positively to the need to provide cover when staff were absent or ill.

Staff on courses where low retention and achievement were improving did not attribute these improvements to any significant changes in academic or vocational staffing levels. They did, however, emphasise a change to more positive approaches by senior managers, and staff development that valued the teacher and sought to improve strategies for teaching and learning.

Quality systems

Questions on quality asked teachers to evaluate the impact of changes in a number of quality factors such as self-assessment, MIS and the observations of teaching and learning. They were also asked to indicate what value they placed on student feedback and the way managers monitored course performance.

As might perhaps be expected, this proved to be one of the most contentious areas, and teacher attitudes were divided. Some quality systems were perceived as directly relating to teaching and learning, but others were seen as directly controlled by senior management and not related to classroom activity eg MIS, management-led target-setting, and so on. Teachers on courses with high retention and achievement, believed that the crucial element of quality improvement was to act on information received, whether it was from MIS, student feedback, the observation of teaching and learning, internal or external verifiers or self-assessment. Where systems were management led

and focused on MIS, however, staff views often echoed those of one respondent who said, 'You're just chasing paperwork which then goes into a black hole'.

The general view was that, 'The teaching observation system with positive feedback has far more impact than MIS' and 'Direct contact with students tells you whether they are content or not'. Some respondents, however, had particularly positive views about observations.

> *More observation of each other's teaching leads to sharing of good practice and we certainly increased the observation of each other's teaching – peer observation as well as observation for the sake of appraisal.*
>
> *As well as using the college's general questionnaire we increased the amount of feedback we were getting from students by using our own subject questionnaire and used the outcomes to feed into our action planning and scheme of work planning.*

Teachers on courses with low or declining retention and achievement seemed either to be complacent about the quality of their provision or to adopt the attitude that quality was already embedded in the team and 'we know what's best'. MIS was generally regarded as 'useless' and one respondent thought that student retention was better before there were any quality systems in place that suggested otherwise. Those on courses with declining retention and achievement were the most critical. One teacher stated, rather acerbically, 'Quality is a euphemism for paperwork, isn't it?' Another blamed college management for having quality systems in place but never acting on student feedback. This, it was claimed, lowered student morale on the course in question and led to a downward spiral in retention and achievement.

Where previously high retention and achievement rates were declining, teachers were divided between the view that 'Quality is fine' and the view that 'Quality is non-existent'. No interviewees made any positive or negative comments about actual quality systems, although there was a complaint that, 'Strategies seem to be used as a process rather than getting results'.

There were some positive responses about quality from teachers on courses where low retention and achievement rates are improving. Yet while there was praise for systems in place for the observation of teaching and learning and even the Inspection process, there were still very negative views about management-controlled quality systems.

> *The quality system is a joke – written for academics – and far more importance is attached to it than there ought to be.*

The mixed responses to quality systems and, in particular, the negative views of what were perceived as management-led systems, would suggest some of the other types of change (notably teaching, curriculum and assessment) are seen by teachers as having a greater positive impact on student success.

Resources

When interviews focused on this area, teachers were asked to clarify the positive or negative impact of changes to preparation time, the number of teaching hours they had and the availability of essential equipment and technical support. They also had the opportunity to discuss the accommodation provided for their course or programme.

In reply, interviewees made a clear distinction between human resources and other resources they thought necessary for students to complete their programmes successfully. A significant number of staff on courses with *high* retention and achievement rates were dissatisfied with both types of resource and claimed these were having a negative impact on retention and achievement. There was dissatisfaction with the number of teaching hours, remission (regarded by one respondent as 'a joke') and the poor quality of many learning environments. Interestingly, one course was given a Grade 1 at Inspection, although it was judged to be run in poor accommodation. Several teachers cited out-of-date vocational resources with one respondent complaining that essential day-to-day resources were never ordered on time.

There was, however, clearly a division between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Staff on some courses with high retention and achievement rates had equipment of current commercial and industrial standard, housed in modern, state-of-the-art accommodation. Some colleges had well-advanced intranets and new buildings where classrooms were equipped with electronic whiteboards. This division is interesting. Although the lack of resources did not seem to be affecting retention and achievement, staff clearly felt that it did, and may have been making compensatory efforts in other areas of activity to make up for the 'shortfall'.

It seems clear that students do convey their sense of dissatisfaction to staff when learning environments are below par and there are insufficient and often outdated resources and equipment.

This concern becomes more apparent on courses with low retention and achievement. Here, perhaps because there are no compensatory factors, poor resourcing might simply add to students' negative experiences. One teacher cited instances of students able to word-process work but unable to print it off because printers had broken down. Another claimed his workshop was now 40 years out of date and no longer relevant to the syllabus. The most negative comments suggested that human resources were almost as overused as some of the workshop equipment and staff had no time to prepare lessons, insufficient delivery time and too much college paperwork.

Courses where high rates of retention and achievement were in decline had the most negative responses of all. Although one or two thought this was not a key issue (because teaching methods were far more significant) there was growing frustration that mismanagement of human (and other) resources made teachers look incompetent in the classroom. One teacher complained that, 'The OHPs don't work, the computers frequently crash and that makes the students lose confidence'. Another commented that a lack of preparation time and insufficient full-time staff '...means teachers come across as harassed, lacking preparation and stressed'.

Teachers on courses where previously low retention and achievement were improving reflected the same division of opinion and experience as those whose retention and achievement rates were high. On the one hand, there were those who believed new resources were helping to raise retention and achievement. On the other hand, retention and achievement were also rising on courses where, as one respondent put it: 'There is out-of-date equipment, lack of computers, poor classrooms and too much use of acetates and boardwork'. On another course, retention and achievement were improving, although the teacher reported that the equipment was, 'poor and frequently broken' and that there was 'a lack of access to computers and software'.

Student cohort

Teachers were asked to rate the impact of the changes to the student cohort in terms of ability and qualifications at the start of the course/programme. They were also asked to determine the impact of students leaving for employment, the amount of part-time work they did and the impact of financial or personal problems on their studies.

This aspect of the survey attracted by far the most comment at interview. Teacher perceptions, however, proved difficult to interpret and understand. On courses with high retention and achievement that were still improving, the general view was that while adult student motivation remained high, the 16–19-year-old student cohort was less committed to learning than in previous years. Teachers felt that the main reasons for this lack of commitment lay in more students having part-time jobs and more personal problems interfering with their studies. Students were felt to be 'not as systematic and hard-working.' One respondent felt:

> *Some students' part-time work commitments are more important to them than their commitment to college – they don't attend as well or achieve as highly as they could.*

Teachers' views were more mixed on courses that were maintaining a high level of retention and achievement. While there was a broad view that current 16–19-year-old students were not as academic as they used to be and that part- time employment was an issue, many felt that teachers could and should cope with these realities, by employing a range of strategies. One respondent suggested, for example, that students were not always sufficiently informed about college courses, the amount of work and the distinctions between course levels. This meant that some students believed that all

vocational courses were 100% practical and that there was little or no written work involved. Appropriate strategies would therefore focus on information, advice, guidance and induction. Another teacher felt that tutors now needed to know more about the impact of students' personal problems on their ability to study and needed to develop counselling skills to deal with these issues.

Most teachers on courses with high retention and achievement rates believed that it is important to understand students as individuals and motivate them to succeed. This was also seen as an ongoing process, necessary to keep students on track. Where appropriate, literacy and numeracy support was seen as an important part of that process. One teacher also stressed the importance of encouraging students to succeed beyond their own expectations; she also encouraged individual aspirations and personal ambitions. Another stressed the importance of motivating students to take on individual responsibility. This view is exemplified in the following statements from teachers:

> *Modern students have low attention spans and are not as academic as they were. This has to be compensated for by better understanding of principles of learning and students need to be more open with staff about their problems and their part-time work.*
>
> *The student cohort has changed significantly, but I'm not blaming the students. We need to respond to them and not the other way round. General cultural attitudes of young people are changing anyway.*

These last two quotes may help to explain why retention and achievement remained high on courses with a high baseline position. There remains the paradox, however, that teachers on courses which started with high retention and achievement rates, *and which improved still further,* were generally rather critical of changes in the attitude and capability of their younger students. When pressed at interview, teachers on courses which were still improving their retention and achievement agreed that while their students were still staying on course and achieving, they were thought not to be the 'high flyers' of yester-year, nor were they thought to be getting as many grade As or Distinctions. Neither of these aspects of the student cohort was systematically tested in the research so it is not possible to evaluate them in detail.

Teachers on courses with high levels of retention and achievement occasionally expressed a view that the Educational Maintenance Award (EMAs) did help some students with financial problems to stay on course and succeed. Not surprisingly, this view was most prevalent in courses that recruited from areas of high rural or urban deprivation.

Teachers on courses where retention and achievement were low or falling further, however, saw EMAs as making a bad student cohort worse. EMAs simply brought in

students who 'just want the money' and 'a disruptive element that drives better students away'. Teachers on these low baseline courses also saw their student intakes as 'dire' and 'of low ability'. In one instance, an interviewee chose to link EMAs and ability with race, suggesting that 'we're seen as an Asian college now' and 'two-thirds of our problem is Asian girls'.

These teachers did not, therefore, express the same kind of view as teachers on courses where high retention and achievement were still improving. Instead, many teachers whose courses had low and declining retention and achievement appeared to be willing to label students, and stereotype them in terms of race, gender and class. Nor did these teachers appear to be able to identify possible solutions. They expressed views that 'it takes too long to determine 'at-risk' students', or that students on the courses had 'a general culture of not succeeding....not being on time, not handing work in on time – lack ability to think about their futures'.

Teachers on courses with low achievement and success rates believed that college management teams deliberately recruited these students to get funding and, as a consequence, did not recruit with integrity. This meant that students were on courses at an inappropriate level, which demotivated them and led them to demotivate others. Students, in their view, were under pressure because they were unable to complete work and had problems at home anyway.

Teachers whose high rates of retention and achievement were in decline expressed almost exactly the same attitudes. They also blamed college managers for making them recruit weak students who would leave and also claimed that because 'support for weak students is finite', too many 'at-risk' students were identified too late. Students were also thought to take on part-time jobs 'to fund a student lifestyle' and too much part-time work made them too tired to study at college – not that they had any study skills anyway! One teacher managed to link most of these issues together and claimed that 25% of students on the course should not be there in any case, so it was hardly surprising that they were not retained and did not achieve. Another summarised most of the views expressed by saying that the course recruited:

> *...weak non-achievers...who have personal problems. They are immature and not prepared to study in a serious way. They have been turned away from better colleges and taken on here. They are accepted even though it is known they will not be retained.*

Teachers on courses where retention and achievement were improving expressed some of these attitudes, but had begun to analyse their student cohorts and take action to improve matters. One accepted that there was a problem with part-time jobs, but had also discovered one student who had to work at a fast food outlet to support his mother. Another believed that part-time work that complemented a vocational course ought to be encouraged and that the EMA, far from being a negative factor, was actually a godsend in what was a very deprived area. Several teachers also said that in

their colleges students were now being recruited with integrity and that they were now taking steps to develop student motivation and correct any misconceptions about the course, early on.

Teachers on these courses also believed that staff–student relationships and relationships between peers were of particular importance. Care was taken to develop a good relationship with students and not to allow negative peer pressure to affect retention and achievement. In one instance, strong students were encouraged to support weaker ones as 'buddies'. Another course team went out of its way to have an enjoyable induction programme that both laid ground rules and built up a group identity. One very committed team leader of a vocational course that had shown rapid improvement said of her group:

> *They're not the best motivated of students, but you have to tap into their uniqueness to help them become motivated. At the moment the students are fasting for Ramadan, so yesterday I fasted so I could gain their respect and understand more of what they're going through and how difficult it is.*

Support for students

Although teachers on courses where high retention and achievement were improving appeared to have a pessimistic view of changes to their student cohorts, this was not reflected in what they did in practice to support students. Instead, there was a desire to provide students with any support within their means and to refer them on to specialists when it was more appropriate to do so. This was done through early identification of 'at-risk' students and referrals to Student Services at an early stage. On one course it was felt that personal tutoring had prevented quite a few students from leaving and parental involvement was sought and encouraged. On two other programmes, staff put on additional support workshops in their own time and in one of these all students had to attend at least one lunchtime drop-in workshop and report back in class on what they did there. One of these courses also ensured that:

> *Additional workshops were put on in exam techniques and requirements for the students who needed them and I think it was beneficial for them. It helped them to improve their performance.*

On courses where high retention and achievement rates were maintained, staff had the same strategies. The staff in most teams were pro-active about providing support, organising additional support and referring students on to Student Services. One interviewee said:

> *We take students seriously and give them time and effort. Students appreciate help with their assignments and all students go to additional support.*

Another said that she was always in her part-time class 15 minutes before the lesson began and stayed there for 15 minutes afterwards. This enabled her to provide extra support for students who knew she would be there. She also felt it was crucial to help these students to support each other and for them to know what Student Support facilities were available in the college and of their right to access them. Most teachers interviewed also thought it important to act quickly over student absenteeism or give prompt support to any student whose lack of progress was a cause for concern. Emphasis was also placed on initial assessment/diagnostic testing and tutorial systems that tracked student progress using one-to-one reviews.

Although one or two staff on courses with low retention and achievement claimed to offer personal support to students, most saw gaps in the system beyond their control. There was a general feeling that individual 'key staff' were solely responsible for this area and things generally went wrong if and when such staff left. Learning support was also felt by one respondent to be 'hit and miss' and that it took the college a long time to work out who was 'at risk' and 'filter them out' of a programme. One or two teachers thought the onus was on students to seek help if they needed it – it was their responsibility and nobody else's.

Support for teachers

At interview, teachers whose courses had the highest retention and achievement reinforced the view that the most effective teams were autonomous. Few teams, however, had actually been empowered by senior managers to be so. Most had taken autonomy on themselves because they did not feel supported by senior managers, line managers or even clerical workers. One team actually operated successfully for a year without a direct line manager or a head of department. A teacher in another team felt he had been 'left to his own devices' and with no technician in the vocational workshops he also had to take on this role as well. Generally speaking, the most effective teams set themselves high standards that they refused to lower in the face of adversity. Disenchantment with management implied that they were driven more by their view of general *professional* standards of teaching rather than by those standards developed within the college. It is interesting to note that most interviewees' responses were focused on their team and what the team did to support students and each other rather than on the leadership of more remote college managers. This was accompanied by some tart comments about the absence of rewards for their efforts. One teacher whose high retention and achievement was still improving commented that there were:

> *...never any positives, but management quickly pick up on negatives – this can lead to student disgruntlement, but in this instance it lead to staff-student collusion against college management.*

There were positive comments about staff development, which was felt to boost staff morale and assist retention and achievement. Some respondents, however, felt staff development sometimes focused on what most concerned managers rather than what really supported teachers. There was also much comment that clerical support, where it existed, freed teachers from major administrative burdens and allowed them to concentrate more on course preparation or being able to put in extra time helping students in difficulty.

Where retention and achievement were poor, teachers seemed to be much more self-oriented. They felt most supported by a team of like-minded people and felt that management-led support systems often existed in name only. Some teachers felt that everything was all right and always had been; others felt this issue had no impact on retention and achievement anyway. Some criticisms were also voiced. In one college, for example, the respondent said that poor administrative and clerical support meant that students often did not receive a reply to their enquiries or were sent inappropriate information. In the same college, staff development was said to be reserved for the favoured few.

Teachers on courses where previously high retention and achievement rates were now declining were mostly neutral in their views, but several individuals felt that a lack of support had made teaching, 'an onerous, burdensome workload'. Where a single member of staff found herself left in sole charge of courses, without any back up, she said that she felt, 'lonely and pressurised' and that she had had 'no reward for getting results anyway'.

Teachers on courses where low retention and achievement were improving were also mostly neutral, but some felt that there were big improvements taking place in staff development and one had a new head of department who was said to be excellent. In this college, because all the heads of department were showing a revived interest in teaching and learning, it was thought that this was now putting pressure on senior managers and they might change too. Another interviewee expressed a similar view but in more detail:

> *Immediate managers have an understanding of teaching and learning and staff needs. Senior managers adopt a top-down approach and usually set up teams to solve problems without asking the people who actually know. We get little support from senior management, only edicts from above.*

Although most teachers gave relatively little emphasis to this area, it became clear that the absence of support was a significant factor for those teams that lacked the strength and/or the support to operate autonomously. With little or no clerical support and under constant pressure to complete growing volumes of management-related paperwork, some teachers felt increasingly harassed and under pressure. This, in turn, appears to be communicated in the classroom, thus increasing student anxieties. There was little

evidence, however, of constructive interventions being made to change this situation by college managers or departmental heads.

Teaching

Staff on courses with high retention and achievement rates thought that there was a particular problem about students' entry qualifications; as they felt under more pressure to take on students with limited qualifications. These teams resisted this pressure, however, and continued to select students carefully. In one college, students were not only expected to have strong qualifications on entry, but to focus on future career prospects and whether the course they had in mind would enable them to progress in the interview. Most respondents also thought that induction was crucial to retention and achievement and that the programme had to involve active learning and, ideally, should be fun. As one teacher put it, her students 'have got to have a feel-good factor by the end of the week'.

Surprisingly, most teachers in teams with high retention and achievement, did not rate teaching methods as a significant factor in retention and achievement, although one teacher emphasised that what was taught in the classroom should always be relevant and use students' own experiences. There was, however, a general feeling that monitoring student progress was crucial and, where necessary, would involve seeing students on a one-to-one basis.

Teachers on courses with the lowest retention and achievement mostly appeared unconcerned about student qualifications on entry. One thought that entry criteria for his course were a 'grey area'; another said that the college only recruited with 'bums on seats' in mind and that many of these students would not be retained. In his opinion, what Marketing needed to do was to find teachers the 'right' students. One teacher whose course had low retention and achievement that was still falling, believed that the role of the teacher and what constituted a good lesson had never changed. What had changed was 'the pressure for data and justifying data. So that makes one take on weak students and get rid of them as soon as possible'. This view was shared by another respondent who said that too much time was taken up by teachers working on college procedures and that, as a team leader, he only had 3 hours remission to deal with 300 students. He felt that his skills had been so adversely affected that he concluded, 'I wouldn't like to be taught by myself'.

Teachers whose classes had the lowest level of retention and achievement also had the most pessimistic view of the impact of changes in teaching. In one instance, a teacher who was new to the profession, had only encountered negative colleagues and could see them convey this negativity to students. This teacher felt that there was limited support available to help improve things and obtained the impression that regardless of what your aspirations are, 'You're just expected to get on with the job'.

Courses where once high retention and achievement were declining had teachers whose responses were mostly neutral and who felt that changes to teaching had no

impact. There was some evidence, however, that students on one programme were no longer being recruited with integrity and teachers identified a need to review admissions and induction procedures. Several interviewees felt there was no longer enough time to monitor student progress in class or to give individuals the attention they deserved.

The most positive responses, however, came from teachers on courses with low retention and achievement that were *improving*. The majority of these had resisted pressure for 'bums on seats' and had become much more proactive in dealing with students' initial enquiries themselves and 'selling' the course enthusiastically. Teams also appear to have reviewed recruitment, induction and teaching and learning. One team did not enrol students until the end of week 2 so that students had sufficient experience of the programme to know that it was exactly what they wanted. Two teams had also reviewed and improved teaching and learning so that teaching methods were more student-centred. Most teams felt they were more aware of issues affecting students' social lives and their problems at home by collecting more data and making use of it. One teacher felt that the whole team was now much more supportive in its relationships with students, while another team leader of a foundation programme said:

> *I've now got a very good teaching team ...who want to know about the students as individuals – they care about them and we're all very positive. Our attitude to student success is 'yes we can do it and yes, we will do it!'.*

It may seem surprising that staff on low baseline, improving courses seem to have more positive responses to this aspect of the interviews than staff on courses with high retention and achievement. This may be because lecturers on low baseline courses are discovering their autonomy as teachers and as teams and are more conscious of their power to make a difference, whereas teachers with high retention and achievement appear sometimes to take those skills for granted. These differences however, become less apparent when comparing interview responses on personal tutoring.

Personal tutoring

Teachers on courses with the highest retention and achievement saw recent changes to tutorial systems as one of the most important means of aiding retention and achievement. This is because one-to-one tutorials, in particular, provided a forum in which students can review progress, give their own feedback and discuss any barriers to learning. Most tutoring systems involve three review and action-planning sessions per year although two colleges have open access systems with tutoring 'on demand' and where those who need it most receive more support.

Teachers on high-performing courses saw tutorials as providing students with help and direction to match their particular needs. They believe that tutorials show students that they are valued as individuals and that this is also a forum for praising student achievements and resolving individual pressures.

Comments like 'We have a brilliant system', 'We're doing even more to improve things' and 'It's the most important factor in retention and achievement' were very noticeable among this group. One respondent said:

> *All our students are closely monitored through tutorials and through their individual tutor. If you see that they're having trouble you can help them, hopefully, sort it out, whether it be with their coursework or their personal problems ... I think we're good at picking up students who won't come forward for help. You can see the signs when they go quiet or they're walking around with a sour face.*

While one or two teachers on courses with low retention and achievement were positive about tutorials, most comments were similar to those that follow:

> *You can't alter bad students, they're more influenced by peer pressure.*
>
> *If they're happy they stay, if they're not they go. Last year we let too many waifs and strays in.*

On several courses, especially those where retention and achievement were still falling, there was either no tutorial system at all or it was claimed tutorials didn't work because the staff were disaffected.

Teachers on courses where high retention and achievement were in decline shared these negative opinions. Most claimed there was either not enough time to run one-to-one tutorials or that senior managers were not prepared to develop newer and more effective tutorial systems.

Teachers on courses where low retention and achievement rates were improving, however, were developing their tutorial systems to review student progress on a one-to-one basis, and were seeing improvements to retention and achievement as a result. One teacher had trained as a counsellor and was now able to give students individual support to resolve what were, in many cases, major crises. As one respondent put it, 'If you're supported and cared for, you're more likely to work through problems'.

Course/programme organisation and administration

This area of the interviews focused on the teachers' effectiveness in working together to organise and manage their programmes. Responses were similar to those expressed concerning the impact of changes to the context of courses and programmes. They reinforced the view that the most successful teams collaborated actively and worked to a common framework. They held regular meetings and reviewed the progress of 'at-risk' students regularly, some on a weekly basis. All teams had

formal minutes and often did their own paperwork in the absence of clerical support. Teams placed strong emphasis both on curriculum issues and tracking student progress through up-to-date files and log books. In one college good practice was shared between departments and strong ground rules were set for all students. Staff at this college – like most teachers whose courses had high retention and achievement - also expressed a strong belief in treating students as individuals because, in their view, 'at the end of the day the students are our customers'.

Teachers whose courses had low retention and achievement rates sometimes retained a strong belief in the team and associated student failings with other areas of the college. Thus, one respondent thought 'The team is excellent. The problem is the students and their low attention spans.' During interviews, a number of criticisms of team focus or procedures were voiced. One teacher said that the problem was that team meetings were about management issues and self-assessment, not about teaching and learning. A second claimed that most of his time was taken up with college administration and that he had little time for teaching and learning, let alone anything else. In other colleges, however, teams had problems holding meetings because their members came from different departments. One interviewee said that his team meetings were not organised and team leadership was poor. This led to staff backbiting about each other in front of their classes. One teacher said that there were no systems to monitor student progress in place, so that the students were 'freewheeling along'.

Similar complaints were heard from teachers whose high baselines for retention and achievement were in decline. Most respondents said it was difficult to find time to meet and there was no time to focus on the learners and their progress. One admitted that the team's administration was unprofessional and that little monitoring of student progress took place. Again, teachers tended to blame what they perceived as an emphasis by senior managers on paperwork and form filling rather than the need to have personal communication about the students:

> *It's important to monitor students carefully to ensure their progress is under review and so that we can ensure their results are in line with their target grades ... but when I filled this questionnaire in I was of the strong opinion that I wasn't able to administer that task in a professional way because of the amount of time needed to do that kind of exercise.*

Where courses with low retention and achievement were improving, the responses tended to mirror those where high retention and achievement were the norm. Although one team member claimed that team meetings were mostly unstructured and about 'fire-fighting', most interviewees claimed that the introduction of structured, timetabled team meetings that shared information about the students had led to improvements in retention and achievement. This seemed particularly effective when teams identified weaker students at an early stage and began tracking their progress. One team had also introduced course reviews that included student representatives.

Timetabling

The last section of the interviews asked teachers to assess the significance of course hours and periods timetabled for teaching and private study in terms of impact on retention and achievement. Staff on courses with high retention and achievement were largely neutral, but did comment that the delivery timetable was now tight, particularly as students appeared to place less importance on self-study. One teacher expressed the view that while the most able students were better at managing their own time, others required additional study periods that needed to be staffed and timetabled. Most believed there should be no significant gaps in a student's time at college and that catch-up weeks are now essential to ensure ongoing assessment of learning and give students time to catch up on assignment work.

At the other end of the scale, teachers on courses with low retention and achievement were divided. Almost half thought it was an issue of little significance, while the rest had a general view that students did not use gaps in their day effectively. One teacher said that in his college timetabling, 'did not focus on students and their needs. Catch-up time was not allowed because college managers are only interested in the economics of teaching hours rather than their function in relation to learning'.

Where previously high retention and achievement rates were in decline, there was some evidence that timetabling was outside the individual teacher's control and that managers were not timetabling effectively. In one college there were many room changes at the start of the college year and some lack of retention could be attributed to this. In another, managers appeared not to take account of student concentration spans and had timetabled some 4-hour teaching sessions. One practical course had had its full-time hours reduced to 15 a week, which meant that not only did students have insufficient time to complete the practical work, but that the quantity and quality of the work were damaged, both affecting achievement. Where timetabling still involved gaps between sessions, several instances were given of students not making efficient or effective use of free time. Another view expressed about self-directed study was:

> *It's just a cheap way of running education. You throw the onus on the student and they sink or swim. It's a costcutting exercise. I think it's one of the most important things in terms of retention and achievement.*

Where retention and achievement were improving on low baseline courses, teachers did not attribute the improvement to timetabling. Most had no comment to make and the few who did reiterated the problem of students having too many gaps between lessons or teaching hours being crammed because of limited teaching time was allocated to a full-time course.

Overall perceptions of factors most affecting retention and achievement

In the original questionnaire the final question listed 13 types of factors, and teachers were asked to select three changes which had a largely negative impact on retention and achievement and three changes which had a largely positive effect. The interviews sought to explore this issue further and asked teachers to identify one positive and one negative factor that they thought had most impact on retention and achievement.

As might be expected from the discussion so far, teachers who taught on teams with the highest retention and achievement focused on key elements of teaching and learning as the most important factors associated with high retention and achievement. There was a belief that students must be on the right course in the first place and taught by well-trained, well-qualified staff teaching well-prepared lessons. This meant recruiting students with integrity, a curriculum delivered in an interesting way and programmes enriched beyond the minimum. Teachers felt that there should be excellent communication between staff and students, and students should receive lots of attention and care. Tutorials were thought to be essential in tracking student achievement. Students should experience early achievement or accreditation to help retain motivation as the course got underway. Not surprisingly, teachers on these courses saw themselves as the keystones of the whole process:

> *Staff dedication overcomes problems with resources, lack of admin and lack of support. If staff stood back, retention and achievement would collapse.*

Most felt that the major negative factors affecting retention and achievement of both adult and 16–19 year-olds were their personal problems. A minority felt that the key issues were either students being on an inappropriate course or poor college facilities and a poor learning environment.

Teachers on courses with low retention and achievement listed the same positive factors, although in rather less detail. Their negative factors, however, reinforced the perception gained from other responses, that they considered these outside their control. They said that lack of management support, lack of resources and low morale led to poor retention and achievement, as did the recruitment of poor quality students. One interviewee thought EMAs were a positive factor in retention, another that they were a negative factor because they brought in students who were only interested in the money.

Teachers on courses where previously high retention and achievement had declined, identified many of the same positive factors. They saw the most positive factors as a strong team, good teachers and motivated students receiving strong tutorial support. The negative factors were similar to those cited by teams with low retention and achievement: lack of preparation time and resources, low morale and an inability, because of these, to meet student expectations.

Teachers on low baseline courses that were improving their retention and achievement, however, were much closer in their responses to teams with the highest retention and achievement. Responses here focused on the fact that students should be recruited with integrity and that induction should be used to ensure their suitability for the programme. It was also thought that teachers should provide an interesting curriculum, teach to students' preferred learning styles and ensure that they had, generally, a good experience of college. They should have good staff who were always supportive and continuously motivating their students to succeed.

Teachers on improving courses also identified a mixture of negative features which they felt would lead to low retention and achievement. Two of these were staff related and suggested that staff with negative attitudes would create the climate for non-attendance, as would long lectures without any student interaction. They also cited factors beyond the lecturer's control, such as poor resourcing and lack of staffing. It was also thought that retention and achievement would be difficult to improve if students were unsuitable for the course in the first place, lacked motivation and were poor attenders.

Drawing some conclusions

The survey and interviews generated a huge amount of rich, detailed, sometimes contradictory but always fascinating, information about teacher perceptions of changes in a wide variety of factors, which affected student retention and achievement.

In very general terms, the research points to both continuities and discontinuities in teacher views, and in their conceptualisation of their role and the factors associated with the effectiveness of student learning.

The elements of continuity and agreement within this large and diverse group were actually stronger than the researchers had initially supposed. Almost all teachers tended to emphasise the importance of good teaching, committed and knowledgeable teachers, effective recruitment, induction, monitoring student progress and tutoring, within the context of effective and supportive teams.

This broad consensus extends further, to the identification of factors with a negative impact. Resources, particularly pressures on teaching time, because of changes to teaching hours and increased administration and paperwork, and poor or outdated accommodation or equipment, were seen as having the most negative impact. There was a similar consensus concerning what broadly could be considered as management failings. Where recruitment policies, timetabling, quality and management information systems were not thought to be learner focused, they were usually identified as negative factors. Somewhat surprisingly, moreover, there was some agreement across the whole group of teachers, that students, particularly younger students, tended to be

less highly motivated and have less well-developed study skills and habits of successful learning, than had previously been the case.

There were also some quite pronounced examples of discontinuity, between teachers whose programmes had relatively high or low baseline positions, and whose retention and achievement rates, over the 3 years, were improving, remaining the same or declining.

This was particularly evident in relation to the views expressed in the survey by teachers on courses with high retention rates that improved still further, compared with those whose retention and achievement rates had declined from a previously high position. Across the whole sample, teachers from improving, high baseline courses, tended to be the *most* optimistic about the positive factors and *least* pessimistic about the negative ones. Conversely, teachers on declining, high baseline courses, tended to be least optimistic about the positive factors, including their own teaching, and the most pessimistic about the negative.

Contrary to expectations, in the survey at least, optimism about teaching and related positive factors tended to be high among teachers from declining, low baseline courses. Equally, and again, contrary to expectations, teachers on improving, low baseline courses did not tend to express particularly optimistic views about their teaching in the survey.

This apparent paradox was explored, and to some extent, explained, in the follow-up interviews; the discussion of which forms the major part of this report.

Three further inferences can be drawn from this research:

- the existence of significantly different ways of conceptualising teaching and the role of teachers, which have some major implications for our view of effective teaching
- the importance of largely implicit and unwritten contracts or agreements, between teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and managers
- the implications of the research for future efforts to improve student retention and achievement rates in colleges, and, perhaps, by extension in work-based and adult and community education.

Teachers' conceptions of teaching

The survey and the subsequent interviews offered teachers the opportunities to express their views on a wide range of issues likely to affect retention and achievement. Their responses indicate areas that most concerned them and imply some strongly held beliefs about their role as teachers and their attitudes to students.

Teachers on courses with high retention and achievement rates seem to conceptualise their job as being about teaching and learning and having the autonomy to make professional judgements. They would like to share this ethos with college managers, but seem able to embody it in their practice in any case, through the operation of more or less autonomous course or programme teams.

As individuals, these teachers also have a strong belief in their own knowledge, skills and expertise and in the quality of their teaching. This means that they welcomed the introduction of teaching observations and actively sought feedback from their students. Not surprisingly, they view the quality of human resources as equally, if not more, important as books, equipment and supportive learning environments.

These concepts have their strongest embodiment in these teachers' belief in strong, self-supporting and stable course teams who are multi-skilled and set themselves high standards in all areas of their work. Such teams focus on course content, curriculum delivery, supporting students and reviewing their progress.

Teachers on courses with the highest retention and achievement rates may express doubts about their students' entry qualifications and levels of ability, but they believe in recruitment with integrity and actively seek to understand the student cohort that they have to work with. Such teachers have a desire to support students and do their best for them. They identify 'at-risk' students as early as possible and are sensitive to the demands the course makes on students as well as pressures they experience in their personal lives. They are also aware that today's young people have different cultural values, hence the need to have a timetable that ensures students are as fully occupied in learning as possible during the college day.

Such teachers also genuinely care about student progress and have a strong belief that students benefit from new tutoring processes involving target setting and review. They do not, however, believe in, for example, value added systems for their own sake. Old-fashioned as it may be, the most successful teachers believe that students need 'tender loving care', something not necessarily always provided at home.

What might be inferred from these statements is an underlying concept of teaching that is based on an interaction and partnership between teachers and learners. Effective teachers in this context are teachers who adapt and develop their teaching to meet the needs of their learners.

Teachers on courses with low or declining retention and achievement appear to fall into two specific categories with regard to their concept of their role. One category of teachers believes that nothing about their role has changed or needs to change. They have a strong belief that they are already adequately fulfilling their professional role and if things need changing, they have little or no scope or autonomy to change them.

The second category of teachers on courses with low retention and achievement could be described as disenchanted, or even disaffected. They feel that their status has been

undermined by management-led initiatives which are threatening enough when they involve changing professional practice, but overwhelmingly so when such changes coincide with restructuring.

Both categories of teacher tend to turn to the course team for mutual support, largely to retain a sense of status and to reinforce the sense that someone else is to blame for poor retention and achievement. This blame usually attaches itself to senior managers or students, although some team members criticise each other for relatively poor performance on their courses.

Such teachers seem to blame their students the most for poor retention and achievement. Teachers, in their view, cannot deliver what senior managers want because the students are perceived as not having the necessary ability, are poorly motivated or have a culture that is not conducive to learning. These are not the type of student such teachers want and they are seen as actually being brought in by college management only for the funding units they represent. This may explain why some teachers in this category believe that a proportion of such students must be filtered out of the college as soon as possible. There is a belief that such students should not really be enrolled in the first place, because they don't want to achieve anyway.

Teachers whose previously high retention and achievement are now in decline, appear to share some of the concepts of teachers whose high retention and achievement is being maintained or is still improving. The interviews suggest that something has happened to make them disenchanted and to take on attitudes and behaviours associated with lower achieving teams. This might be a result of sudden changes within the team, perceived changes in management attitudes or a belief that key changes are inherently wrong anyway. When this change is coupled with a long-standing belief that one's good work has never been acknowledged or rewarded anyway, this results in a sense of low self-esteem that then becomes projected into the workplace. Teachers in this category appear to see the learning environment, learning resources and students in a particularly negative light.

These teachers now begin to share some of the same views of students as staff on courses with low retention and achievement. They believe that students are not being recruited with integrity, but assert this is a senior management responsibility and not their own. They also expressed beliefs, more pronounced than in any other category, that such students need more rigorous assessment and stricter deadlines and that if students experienced problems there was no time to deal with them.

Teachers on courses where low retention and achievement were improving began to change their perceptions of themselves and their teams. This sometimes happened because they were encouraged to do so by a new line manager, but usually because teachers recognised there were new strategies available that might make a difference to student retention and achievement.

This change in attitude appears to be associated with a perception that teams can be strong and that teachers can make a difference. Teams appear to become more structured as a result and to place more emphasis on quality systems, like the observation of teaching and learning and student feedback.

Teachers in this category still had some negative views about their students, but they began to analyse their student cohorts and tried to understand student lifestyles. Teams in this category begin to recruit with more integrity, focus on student performance and understand why they are not achieving. Caring for students and helping them are seen to get results.

Unwritten contracts and agreements

Over the last 10 years, much work has been undertaken to formalise further education. Both staff and students have written contracts that attempt to determine working practices in the college and the classroom. The present research suggests, however, that there are other, invisible contracts between both teachers and managers and teachers and students. These may, in reality, be much stronger than those that, on paper, appear more contractual and binding. In the light of this research, some tentative conclusions can be drawn concerning the nature of such implicit contracts.

As far as teachers on courses with high retention and achievement are concerned, the most important unwritten contracts are with other teachers in the course team and with students. The contract between team members is to be mutually supportive and dedicate themselves to student success. The contract with students is to provide quality teaching and tutorial support in return for retention and achievement. While an unwritten contract with the team, however, might be of long-standing, those with students are subject to continuous ongoing review.

This is not to say that teachers on courses with the highest retention and achievement place no importance on unwritten contracts with college managers. They do – but only if they perceive that managers are reasonably committed to teaching and learning and supportive of both staff development and student success.

Teachers on courses where retention and achievement rates remain low or decline further appear to believe that, as teachers, they have an unwritten contract with college managers. That contract appears to rest on the managers' ability to support them in their role and provide a working environment where they can be successful teachers. There is some evidence that such teachers do try to conform to management-led process improvements while grappling with the everyday work of teaching and learning. When management actions subsequently do not respect or support their professional role, but focus instead on a teacher's failure to achieve, the unwritten contract is broken.

When courses with previously high retention and achievement decline, there is some evidence that teachers on these courses have not only lost the professional satisfaction associated with student success, but are also losing the part of the unwritten contract with managers to the effect that success is not only acknowledged, but might one day be rewarded with promotion. It also seems likely that changes within a long-standing team have not generated a new unwritten contract with team replacements. That said, there are teams that admit their staleness and the need to review the way they operate.

Teachers on courses where low retention and achievement are improving, appear capable of making a range of unwritten contracts. There is evidence that they will respond to new managers in return for staff development and an acknowledgement that the course is improving. They will also make the same unwritten contracts within the course team and with students as those made by teachers on courses with high retention and achievement.

Improving retention and achievement

This research has focused on teacher perception of a range of change factors likely to have an impact on student retention and achievement. Through interviewing staff teaching on a range of courses, this project has sought to determine what teachers regard as the most significant positive and negative factors accounting for differences between courses which have the highest retention and achievement and those where retention and achievement is declining. The purpose of the research was not to produce a checklist of best practice, but to understand better what ideas and attitudes underpin effective teaching and learning.

The outcomes of the research suggest that all teachers bring to their work specific aptitudes, attitudes and strategies which affect student retention and achievement. More importantly, these aptitudes, attitudes and strategies are quite similar within each category chosen for this study. There are, therefore, some reasonably distinct and predominant patterns of thinking and behaviour on courses with high retention and achievement, low retention and achievement and on those where high retention and achievement is in decline or where low retention and achievement is improving.

While the research also bears out the initial hypotheses, that teachers who are most successful attribute success to their own agency and that those who are not as successful attribute this to factors, beyond their control, it would be unwise to assume that one cannot intervene in this behaviour. What is crucial is for college managers and other stakeholders outside colleges, to realise that improvement efforts that do not engage the ways that teachers conceptualise their role and their value systems, are likely to be ineffectual.

For most of the 1990s, successive governments have attached a high priority to improving retention and achievement in colleges. This policy imperative was embodied in funding and inspection frameworks; colleges that were seen to be under-achieving

were 'named and shamed'. Colleges have been required to set public and published improvement targets, agreed by their governing bodies, and quite large sums of discretionary funding (in the shape of the Standards Fund) have been allocated to high-performing colleges, to disseminate their practice, and to low performing colleges to improve theirs.

Improvements in retention and achievement rates are central to the development plans of many colleges, and remain a focus of senior management attention and energy. Notwithstanding all this effort, substantial improvements have proved elusive. Retention rates have barely improved over the last 4 years for which data is available (1996–2000). Achievement rates have improved over the same period, but the rate of improvement appears to be slowing down.

The present research offers some insights into the real difficulties in making sustained improvements in student retention and achievement, and suggests some ways forward. It suggests that improvement efforts that are not focused almost obsessively on students' learning and teachers' teaching and the *interaction* between the two will not be successful. This is in line with a large body of contemporary research on school improvement.

The evidence suggests, however, that this apparently straightforward conclusion is complicated by three intervening factors:

- teacher concepts of teaching and attitudes towards their role and their students
- the operation of teaching teams
- the existence of implicit or unwritten contracts between teachers and managers.

Staff development, teacher training, qualified teacher status and teaching standards all have a role in the development of the competences and skills of teachers. Neither they, nor any of the other policy levers listed above appear to have been particularly successful in influencing the behaviours and views of some of the experienced teachers who were interviewed in the course of the present research.

Concepts of teaching are deeply embedded in teachers' values and beliefs, and in large part, reflect those values (Showers *et al.* 1987, Borko and Putnam 1995). It is notoriously difficult to change values, but it is possible (Wasley 1994, Fullan 1992). To do so, however, requires a fundamental and deepseated commitment by managers at all levels, to commit to and support such change, and to do so consistently, not least through the ways that they provide models through their own behaviour.

Similar, but different conclusions can be drawn concerning teams. Teams have an ambivalent role in this research. Effective, confident and autonomous teams appear to sustain and enthuse teachers on the most successful courses. But, they also appear to support and confirm the belief that there is little or no scope for improvement among

teachers on some of the least successful courses. The implication is that improvement strategies that seek to engage teachers will also need to engage the teams and other communities within which teaching is planned and delivered.

These conclusions tend to be reinforced by a further inference: the existence and importance of implicit or unwritten contracts, particularly contracts between teachers and managers. The research indicates that disengagement and a sense of powerlessness is associated with perceptions of a cancellation, or breakdown of such contracts between teachers and managers.

The implication is that to improve retention and achievement, managers will need to renew the implicit or symbolic contracts with their teachers, if they want teachers, in turn, to renew and develop their own partnerships with their students.

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Appendix 1: Colleges that participated in the survey

Barnfield College
Barnet College
Bolton College
Bournemouth and Poole College
City College, Norwich
Cornwall College
Exeter College
Kensington and Chelsea College
Loughborough College
Richard Huish College
Sandwell College
Sir George Monoux College
Solihull Sixth Form College
South Birmingham College
Truro College
West Herts College

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Appendix 2: Research methods

The survey

The objectives of the present research were to identify those factors that are most closely associated with improvement, maintenance or decline in student outcomes in colleges. To this end, a cross-section of colleges was approached to take part in the study.

The research design that was developed in consultation with the volunteer colleges during two initial meetings would:

- take the course/programme as the unit of analysis
- consist of a survey in the first instance
- include a structured sample of courses in each of the participating colleges
- select courses with a minimum of 15 students
- survey only staff who had a minimum of 2 years' experience of teaching on a relevant course.

The sampling frame would include roughly equal numbers of improving and declining courses and roughly equal numbers of courses with a high or low baseline position. In both dimensions, the rate of improvement/baseline position was calculated by reference to college rather than national norms. This gave four categories of course:

- low baseline position and improvement
- courses with a low baseline position and no improvement or decline
- courses with a high baseline position and improvement
- courses with a high baseline position and no improvement or decline.

The baseline position and degree of improvement were calculated by reference to the 'success rate' of a course. The success rate is the proportion of students who start (from the first census date of a year of a course) who achieve the qualification aim. In other words, success rates can be calculated by multiplying retention rates by the achievement rates.

The sample of colleges is broadly representative of the college sector in England. Fifteen colleges took part in a survey: two sixth form colleges and 13 FE or tertiary colleges, one of which has a particularly strong emphasis on adult students. Colleges are located in five of the nine regions of England and have a variety of local contexts ranging from inner city to urban from suburban to small town and rural.

The breakdown of completed questionnaires by categories of course is set out in Table 1 below.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Total%
Courses in each category	18	39	32	22	19	6	136	100%
Number of questionnaires in each category	24	66	57	34	35	15	231	100%
% of total questionnaires	10.4	28.6	24.7	14.7	15.2	6.5	100%	100%

Key

1. High baseline, improving
2. High baseline, maintaining
3. Low baseline, improving
4. Low baseline, maintaining
5. High baseline, declining
6. Low baseline, declining

A detailed questionnaire was developed and piloted by three colleges. The administrative procedures for the survey were agreed. Simply put, college coordinators identified courses within the sampling frame, distributed questionnaires and collected the completed questionnaires. Staff were encouraged to complete their questionnaire individually under 'examination conditions'; in other words, to give an immediate response to the questionnaire rather than taking it away to research their records or discuss it with other members of their team. The college coordinator collected and returned the completed questionnaires to LSDA and also completed a small data sheet giving quantitative information concerning each of the courses included in the sample. Each course was also assigned to one of the four course categories.

The categorisation made by the course coordinator has been amended, in a number of cases, for one or two reasons. Firstly a consideration of the numerical data suggested that the original four categories should be expanded to six:

- low baseline position, improving
- low baseline position, maintaining
- low baseline position, declining
- high baseline position, improving
- high baseline position, maintaining
- high baseline position, declining.

Second, a small number of courses were re-coded to ensure that there was greater conformity between the quantitative data and the course categorisation.

The interviews

The second, qualitative part of the project, on which the substance of the present report is based, consisted of detailed interviews of 59 staff who completed questionnaires (26% of the overall total) to:

- investigate more fully the responses to the survey
- clarify and check some of the tentative conclusions drawn from the survey
- provide the opportunity for teachers to discuss, in a relatively open and unstructured way, their understandings of the factors affecting retention and achievement.

The interviews were carried out in 11 of the 15 participating colleges between November 2000 and January 2002. These were located in five of the nine regions of England and have a variety of local contexts ranging from inner city to urban, from suburban to small town and rural. Interviews covered a wide range of programmes from Foundation to Level 4. Most of the staff were interviewed individually, but there were two interviews involving two or three members of the same curriculum team.

The interviews were conducted in private and were confidential. Care was taken to explain the interview procedure and not to condition any response. Where necessary, individual responses were subject to further clarification and all interviewees were asked if they would like to comment further on any neutral responses they had made on their original questionnaire. Staff were also reminded to focus on their responses to changes between 1997–2000 rather than comment on the current situation within their individual course, college or programme area.

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Before each interview, interviewees were given the opportunity to remind themselves about the questionnaire and their responses. To focus them about the open-ended question at the end, they also had the opportunity to read their responses again and to select what they considered the most important positive/negative factor. A few interviewees did revise their views. One or two interviewees also amended several positive and negative responses, on the grounds that the questionnaire had been given to them at a difficult time, eg during college restructuring.

One or two interviewees expressed anxieties concerning college management and sought reassurance that what they said would not go back to senior managers. Two interviewees refused to be recorded in one college, and in another, a lecturer asked if he could have a photocopy of the interviewer's notes (which were provided). Another team leader of a rapidly improving course began the interview quite defensively, but warmed considerably when talking about the students and her team.

Most of the interviewees were open and forthcoming, but one or two of the best teachers adopted what could be described as a persona/mask and the interviewer had to recognise this and 'dig' beneath the surface. The interviewer was conscious of the need to make the interviews as open and transparent as possible, while being aware that interviewees and college managers may have hidden agendas. Most interviewees constantly asked what the interviewer thought about particular situations in their colleges. The interviewer was very conscious of the need to avoid expressing an opinion or confirming their opinions.

The interviews took place between five and six months after the questionnaires were completed. Interviews can therefore only record individual perceptions at that point in time. If a college was experiencing massive restructuring (as one was) the interviews were coloured, to some degree, by staff concerns about redundancy/promotion. Curriculum 2000 was being implemented at the same time as the research took place, and *after* the period which was the focus of the research (1997–2000). Because it was causing problems; many interviewees wanted to comment on this and one or two wanted to change their responses because of their experience of Curriculum 2000. The interviewer always shifted the focus away from Curriculum 2000 and back to their responses at the time the questionnaire was filled in.

A few interviewees also wished to produce evidence that things on their courses were better than they had been. That was something else the interviewer had to ask them to put to one side.

Appendix 3: Letter to survey respondents and guidance

3 April 2001

To: All staff included in the research on factors affecting retention and/or achievement 1997–2000

Dear Colleague

Ref: Research into factors affecting retention and/or achievement

Thank you for your help in taking part in this research. It is the most comprehensive research to date based on the views of teachers and tutors in further education on this crucial subject.

Why should I bother?

This research will identify more definitely than ever before the key factors which are affecting the success of your students.

You will receive a copy of the national report based on this research.

Will my answers be confidential?

Your answers will be treated in confidence by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, (the new name for FEDA). No specific course/programme or college will be identified in any way in any publication arising from this project.

How much time does it take?

The questionnaire should take between 25 and 35 minutes to complete. It does not involve going back to course records.

What happens next?

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return it to your college's coordinator who gave it to you. All the questions will be analysed by the Agency and we will send a report back to your coordinator.

Once the research is written up, we will supply your college with enough copies for you and your colleagues who have also taken part in the research.

Who else is taking part in the research?

Around 1,000 staff teaching on over 200 courses/programmes in 20 colleges are taking part in this research. The research covers the period 1997/1998 to 1999/2000. You should have taught on the course/programme for at least 2 of these 3 academic years.

Is there any guidance?

I have attached some brief guidance on completing the questionnaire to this letter.

Thank you very much again for taking part in this research. I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

Until then, with best wishes.

Yours sincerely

P Martinez (Dr)
Development Adviser

Encs

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Guidance on completing the questionnaire (appended to letter to survey respondents): factors affecting retention and/or achievement

Ink or pencil?

Please use black or blue ink to complete this questionnaire.

Focus of the questionnaire

Please complete the questionnaire with a focus on the course/programme identified at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Period covered by questionnaire

The questionnaire covers the period of the 3 academic years: 1997/1998, 1998/1999 and 1999/2000. Please answer the questions in relation to this period. There is a separate section on the last page for you to identify changes with a significant impact in the ***current*** academic year.

Factual section of questionnaire

The questionnaire begins with a short factual section about this course/programme.

Factors affecting retention and/or achievement

This is the main section of the questionnaire and consists of lists of 13 sorts of factor from Curriculum (Section A) to Timetabling (Section M).

Each factor has 2 boxes indicating the amount of change:

Little or no change	Significant change
A	**B**
☐	☐

Please tick the relevant box to indicate whether there has been little or no change or significant change in the relevant factor.

Each factor also has five boxes indicating the impact of changes on student retention and/or achievement. Please tick the relevant box to indicate whether the change has had:

a large negative impact (column 1)
a moderate negative impact (column 2)
no impact (column 3)
a moderate positive impact (column 4)
a large positive impact (5).

Example

If course/syllabus content (Factor A1) has changed a lot and the change has had a moderate positive impact on retention and/or achievement, your completed answer will look like this:

Little or no change	Significant change		large negative impact		no impact		large positive impact
A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☑	A1 Courses/syllabus content	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐

Free text box at end of each section

At the end of each of the 13 sections there is a free text box. This is to allow you to give some examples of the sorts of changes that have had the largest impact (whether positive or negative) on student retention and/or achievement. Please use this box to describe changes, which you have scored 1 (large negative impact) or 5 (large positive impact).

Changes with largest impact

On the last page of the questionnaire there is a section that asks you to identify the changes which had the largest impact. Please tick the 3 factors where changes have had the largest negative impact and also the three factors where changes have had the largest positive impact on retention and/or achievement.

2000/2001 academic year

Please use the free text section at the end of the questionnaire to identify changes in the *current* academic year, which are likely to have a significant impact on retention and/or achievement for this course/programme.

CHANGES AFFECTING RETENTION & ACHIEVEMENT

learning and skills development agency

NAME OF COURSE OR PROGRAMME

FACTUAL SECTION RELATING TO THE COURSE OR PROGRAMME

What is the level of the course/programme?

☐ Level 1 ☐ Level 2 ☐ Level 3

In 1999-2000, what type of qualification did the course/programme lead to?

☐ GCSE ☐ AS or A level ☐ GNVQ
☐ National Diploma ☐ NVQ ☐ Other

If 'Other', please say what

Is the course:

☐ Full Time ☐ Part Time

How many hours of teaching per week does this course have?

How long does the course last?

☐ One year ☐ Two years ☐ Other

If 'Other', please state the length of course/programme

What age are most students on the course?

☐ 16 - 19 ☐ 19 +

How many staff teach on this course/programme?

☐ One ☐ 2 - 3 ☐ 4 - 5 ☐ 6 - 10 ☐ more than 10

What role(s) do you carry out on the course / programme?

(Please tick all boxes that apply.)

☐ Teacher ☐ Tutor ☐ Course leader
☐ Other
(Please specify)

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT RETENTION/ACHIEVEMENT

In relation to this course / programme:

1) **How much change has there been to each of the factors over the three academic years 1997 - 2000?**
Please indicate by ticking one of the boxes to the left of each statement
(A = little or no change or B = significant change)

2) **How have the changes affected retention /achievement over the three academic years 1997 - 2000?**
Please indicate this by ticking the relevant boxes: where: **1 = large negative impact** *and* **5 = large positive impact.** *Please use the accompanying free text box to illustrate the sort of changes that have occurred if you have scored either* **1** *or* **5**. *For ease of reference, the factors have been grouped into a number of categories. Changes in the current (2000 - 2001) academic year should be recorded separately at the end of the questionnaire.*

A: CURRICULUM

How have changes to any of the curriculum factors impacted on retention/achievement over the three academic years 1997 - 2000:

little or no change	significant change		large negative impact		no impact		large positive impact
A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	A1. Course/syllabus content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A2. Course/programme structure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A3. Degree of difficulty of course/programme for students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A4. Awarding body	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A5. Scheme of work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A6. Way in which scheme of work introduced to students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A7. Amount of enrichment linked to course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A8. Amount of enrichment not linked to course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A9. Tutoring arrangements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A10. Arrangements for Key Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	A11. Any other curriculum factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
A12. Overall, how have changes to curriculum factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. A1) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

B: CONTEXT OF YOUR COURSE/PROGRAMME

	A	B		1	2	3	4	5
B1.	☐	☐	Quality of internal communications in your team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B2.	☐	☐	Clarity of what is expected of you by your line manager	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B3.	☐	☐	How successes are dealt with by your course leader	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B4.	☐	☐	How problems are dealt with by your course leader	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B5.	☐	☐	Morale within your team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B6.	☐	☐	Morale within your department or faculty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B7.	☐	☐	Whether innovation in your teaching is encouraged	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B8.	☐	☐	Emphasis placed on *improving* teaching and learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B9.	☐	☐	Any other context factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

B10. Overall, how have changes to the context of the programme factors impacted on retention and achievement? **1** ☐ **2** ☐ **3** ☐ **4** ☐ **5** ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. B2) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

C: ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

	A	B		1	2	3	4	5
C1.	☐	☐	Students' understanding of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C2.	☐	☐	Amount of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C3.	☐	☐	Methods of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C4.	☐	☐	Scheduling of assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C5.	☐	☐	Policy on deadlines for handing work in	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C6.	☐	☐	Amount of private study or homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C7.	☐	☐	Helpfulness of feedback to students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C8.	☐	☐	Any other assessment/feedback factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

C9. Overall, how have changes to assessment and feedback factors impacted on retention and achievement? **1** ☐ **2** ☐ **3** ☐ **4** ☐ **5** ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. C3) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

D: STAFFING

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	D1. Membership of your course/programme team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D2. Mix of skills in your course/programme team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D3. Your course/programme team leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D4. Ratio of full to part time teachers in your course/ programme team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D5. Amount of staff absence in your team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D6. Your department/faculty headship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D7. Senior curriculum leadership in your college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D8. Composition of the group of personal tutors who tutor your students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	D9. Any other staffing factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
D10. Overall, how have changes to staffing factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. D4) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

E: QUALITY SYSTEMS

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	E1. Self-assessment process for your course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E2. Availability of information from MIS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E3. Observation of teaching and learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E4. Observation of tutoring	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E5. Processes for generating feedback from students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E6. Use you make of feedback from students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E7. Ways that managers monitor performance on your course/ programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	E8. Any other quality systems factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
E9. Overall, how have changes to quality system factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. E5) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

F: RESOURCES

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	F1. Time you have available for preparation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F2. Number of teaching hours you have	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F3. Number of different courses you teach on	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F4. Availability of essential equipment for your course/ programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F5. Availability of technical support and backup	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F6. Accommodation for your course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	F7. Any other resource factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
F8. Overall, how have changes to resource factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. F6) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

G: STUDENT COHORT

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	G1. Motivation of students on your course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G2. Ability of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G3. Qualifications of students at commencement of the course/programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G4. Learning skills of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G5. Clarity of personal/career goals of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G6. Proportion of students leaving for a job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G7. Amount of paid part time work done by students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G8. How near to college your students live	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G9. Financial problems of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G10. Personal/emotional/health problems of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	G11. Any other student cohort factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
G12. Overall, how have changes to student cohort factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. G7) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

H: SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	H1. Involvement of parents of younger students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H2. Ways that students are encouraged to support each other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H3. Financial support available	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H4. Counselling and guidance support available	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H5. Availability of staff *(personal tutor/subject teachers)* to provide individual support when needed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H6. Take up of learning support by students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H7. Integration of learning support support within your course/ programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H8. Length of time it takes to identify "at risk" students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H9. Amount of support available for "at risk" students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H10. Methods of acknowledging/rewarding student progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	H11. Any other support for students factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

H12. Overall, how have changes to support for students factors impacted on retention and achievement? **1** ☐ **2** ☐ **3** ☐ **4** ☐ **5** ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change to any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. H8) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

I: SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	I1. Support available to you from within your team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I2. Support available to you from within our department or faculty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I3. Support available to you from within your college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I4. Mechanisms to acknowledge/reward effective teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I5. Opportunities available for staff development	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I6. Administrative/clerical support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	I7. Any other support for teachers factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I8. Overall, how have changes to support for teacher factors impacted on retention and achievement? **1** ☐ **2** ☐ **3** ☐ **4** ☐ **5** ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. I7) *to indicate the factor you are referring to*

J: TEACHING

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	J1. Your role as a teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J2. Recruitment and selection processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J3. Entry requirements/admissions policy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J4. Induction processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J5. Ways you monitor individual student progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J6. Variety of teaching strategies you use	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J7. Amount of teaching time involving different tasks for lower *(or higher)* attaining students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J8. Amount of teaching time available to work with individual students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J9. Proportion of teaching time involving "active learning" by students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J10. Your involvement in development activity inside your college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J11. Your involvement in professional activity outside the college	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	J12. Any other teaching factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
J13. Overall, how have changes to teaching factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. J6) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

K: PERSONAL TUTORING (ON THIS COURSE/PROGRAMME)

A	B		1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	K1. Role of the personal tutor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	K2. Amount of time students have for one-to-one tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	K3. Amounts of time students have for group tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	K4. Target setting processes in personal tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	K5. Review and action planning processes in personal tutorials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
☐	☐	K6. Any other personal tutoring factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	1	2	3	4	5
K7. Overall, how have changes to personal tutoring factors impacted on retention and achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number* (e.g. K5) *to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

L: COURSE/PROGRAMME ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

	A	B		1	2	3	4	5
L1.	☐	☐	Ways you monitor and record student progress	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L2.	☐	☐	Amount of course administration	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L3.	☐	☐	Time available for team meetings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L4.	☐	☐	Effectiveness of team meetings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L5.	☐	☐	Team use of shared learning materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L6.	☐	☐	Team involvement in planning all aspects of course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L7.	☐	☐	Amount of team teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
L8.	☐	☐	Any other course/programme organisation and administration factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

L9. Overall, how have changes to course organisation and administration factors impacted on retention and achievement? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number (e.g. L4) to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

M: TIMETABLING

	A	B		1	2	3	4	5
M1.	☐	☐	Hours within which the course/programme is taught each day	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M2.	☐	☐	Amount of gaps in timetable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M3.	☐	☐	Number of weeks the course is taught over the year	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M4.	☐	☐	Amount of timetabled private study time for students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M5.	☐	☐	Amount of time on timetable for students to "catch up"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
M6.	☐	☐	Any other timetabling factor *(please specify which, below)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

M7. Overall, how have changes to timtabling factors impacted on retention and achievement? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

Please use the box below to describe the change for any factors that you have **scored 1** *or* **5**, *using the reference number (e.g. M3) to indicate the factor you are referring to.*

Changes with largest impact

*Below is a list of 13 types of factors where you can tick those with the largest positive or negative impact. Please put a tick against the **3** factors where changes have had the largest negative impact and also the **3** factors where changes have had the largest positive impact on retention/ achievement.*

Negative		Positive
☐	A. CURRICULUM	☐
☐	B. CONTEXT OF YOUR COURSE	☐
☐	C. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK	☐
☐	D. STAFFING	☐
☐	E. QUALITY SYSTEMS	☐
☐	F. RESOURCES	☐
☐	G. STUDENT COHORT	☐
☐	H. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS	☐
☐	I. SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS	☐
☐	J. TEACHING	☐
☐	K. PERSONAL TUTORING	☐
☐	L. COURSE ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION	☐
☐	M. TIMETABLING	☐

2000 - 2001 Academic Year

Please use the box below to identify any changes in the current academic year which are likely to have a significant impact on retention/achievement.

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this form. It is much appreciated.

Please return the questionnaire to:

Paul Martinez, Learning & Skills Development Agency, FREEPOST (BS 6745), London, SE11 5BR

by

Friday 11th May 2001

Appendix 5: Guidance notes for college coordinators

1 Selection of courses/programmes: introduction

1.1 This exercise depends on being able to compare like with like so far as possible. We have agreed, therefore, to include courses/programmes within a 'sampling frame' and then select from that sample.

2. Sampling frame

2.1 Courses/programmes to be included in the sampling frame will have the following characteristics.

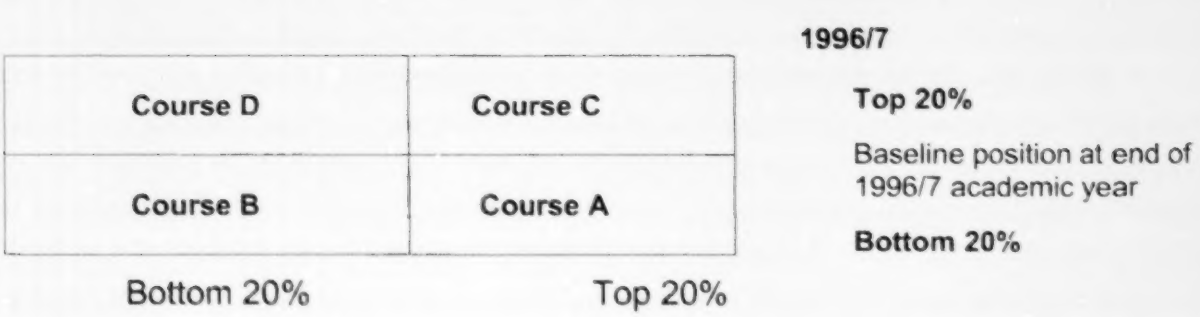
- For 1-year courses, to be running in each of the 3 academic years 1997/8 – 1999/2000
- for courses lasting longer than 1 year, to have had a final year in each of the same 3 academic years
- to have no less than 12 'starters' (ie students who start and have not withdrawn before 1 November in the relevant academic year)
- are at Level 1, 2 or 3
- are 'long' courses (ie with a minimum of 120 guided learning hours in a year)
- the course/programme is or comprises part of a student's primary learning goal.

2.2 It is a matter of judgement whether changes to the course interrupt continuity. As a rule of thumb, the test is one of the degree of continuity. Thus, moving between GNVQ and National Diploma as a qualification aim would not necessarily interrupt continuity.

2.3 Work- or employer-based programmes should be excluded from the sampling frame. This is because the employer variable is likely to be so significant that such programmes would require a separate research study.

3. Selection of sample of courses

3.1 Please select 3 courses/programmes within each of the 4 boxes of the matrix set out below (ie a total of 12 courses).



3.2 Examples:

Course A was in the bottom 20% of courses at the end of the 1996/7 academic year, but in the 20% of courses, which improved most ,1997–2000.

Course B was in the bottom 20% of courses at the end of the 1996/7 academic year and in the 20% of courses which improved least.

Course C was in the top 20% of courses at the end of the 1996/7 academic year and in the 20% of courses which improved most.

Course D was in the top 20% of courses at the end of the 1996/7 academic year, but in the 20% of courses which improved least.

3.3 The baseline position and extent of improvement should be calculated in relation to your own college's norms. In other words, you will select programmes in the top or bottom 20% by reference to your own college's data rather than national norms.

3.4 The criterion in respect of the calculation of both the baseline position and the rate of improvement is the 'success ratio'. The success ratio represents the percentage of achievers over those students who have started the course (and who did not withdraw prior to 1 November).

3.5 Simply put, the success ratio is the product of multiplying the percentage retention rate by the percentage achievement rate.

3.6 In respect of the improvement criteria, this should be calculated ***cumulatively*** from September 1997 to July 2000.

3.7 In respect of the baseline criteria this should be calculated by reference to the position at the end of the 1996/7 academic year.

3.8 Fluctuation in a success ratio does not matter; it is the cumulative change over the 3-year period that counts.

4. Selection of staff

4.1 Whatever other role they may have (eg tutor, course team leader, etc) respondents should have a teaching commitment to the course/programme for at least 2 of the 3 years in question. For the purposes of the research, this will make them 'qualifying staff'.

4.2 For courses/programmes with 5 or fewer 'qualifying staff', give all 'qualifying staff' members of the team a copy of the questionnaire.

4.3 For courses/programmes with 6 or more 'qualifying staff', please distribute the questionnaire to a maximum of 5 'qualifying staff', including a mix of full-time and part-time staff as appropriate.

5. Timing

5.1 Please return the completed questionnaires to Graham Knight (at the Vauxhall, London office of the Agency) in the *Freepost* envelope provided to arrive on or before **Friday 11 May**.

5.2 Please remember to include the data sheets (see section 7 below).

5.3 We will send you sufficient copies of the questionnaire and letters to staff (60 per college), to arrive no later than the week commencing 9 April.

6. Distribution of questionnaires

6.1 Please distribute the questionnaires directly to the 'qualifying' members of staff who will be completing them.

6.2 Staff may teach on a number of different programmes. To make the focus of the questionnaire clear, please write the title of the relevant course/programme in the beginning of the questionnaire and make sure this tallies with the title on the relevant data sheet (see section 7 below).

6.3 Please hold a briefing session to deal with any questions and allay any anxieties.

6.4 Please emphasise the importance of the exercise, its confidentiality and the need for more or less instantaneous completion of the questionnaire.

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6.5 Please emphasise that the questionnaire is to be completed individually rather than as a team effort.

6.6 It is worth reminding staff that this is an attempt to get at reality through a survey. Respondents should be encouraged to complete it fairly quickly without reference to course files, etc.

6.7 Without being unduly prescriptive, you might find it easiest to invite people to a briefing, supply them liberally with coffee and biscuits and get them to complete the questionnaire on the spot.

7. Course/programme data sheet

7.1 You will receive a supply of course/programme data sheets separate from the questionnaires.

7.2 Please ensure that a data sheet is completed for each of the 12 courses/programmes you select to include in this survey.

7.3 Please complete the data sheet from your central MIS records and **do not** distribute it in with the survey.

7.4 Please return the completed data sheets along with the completed survey forms to Graham Knight in the envelope provided. It would be helpful if you would attach the set of completed questionnaires to the relevant course/programme data sheet.

7.5 Please record the number of questionnaires distributed and the number returned **for each programme/course** on the data sheet.

7.6 Finally, please indicate the type of the course in terms of its baseline and improvement.

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Appendix 6: Data sheet for each course/programme

FOR CO-ORDINATOR'S USE ONLY : COURSE / PROGRAMME DATA

Title of Course/ Programme

For each of the last three academic years, please give the information requested in the table below. Please have regard to the ***Explanatory Notes*** given on the reverse of this page.

COURSE / PROGRAMME DATA

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Academic Year	**Starts (Number)**	**Retention (%)**	**Achievement Rate (%)**	**Success Rate (%)**
1999-2000				
1998-1999				
1997-1998				

Number of questionnaires

How many questionnaires did you give out for this course?

How many completed questionnaires did you get back?

Type of course / programme

Please tick the box which best describes this course:

- High baseline position, high improvement ☐
- High baseline position, little or no improvement ☐
- Low baseline position, high improvement ☐
- Low baseline position, little or no improvement ☐

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Explanatory Notes : Course / Programme Data

Column 1 - The academic year relates to the year the course completed. Thus, two-year courses completed in 1997/98 would need to show students enrolled as at 1st November 1996.

Column 2 - Please state the number of students who start and do not leave before 1st November in the same academic year for one-year courses and in the preceding year for two-year courses.

Column 3 - Please calculate this percentage as follows:

Students still enrolled on the 1st May expressed as a percentage of student starters who have not left before the previous 1st November for one-year courses and 1st November for the preceding year for two-year courses.

Column 4 - Please calculate this percentage as follows:

Students who achieve a pass in the qualification aim expressed as a percentage of completers.

Column 5 - Please calculate this percentage as follows:

Students who achieved a pass expressed as a percentage of starters in column 3 multiplied by the percentage of achievers in column 4.

Number of questionnaires
This allows us to identify the extent of any non-returns. Ideally we anticipate a 100% rate of return.

Type of course / programme
'Baseline' and 'improvement' are defined and discussed in Section 3 of the *Guidance Notes for College Co-ordinators*.

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[redacted]

raising quality and achievement programme

The Raising Quality and Achievement Programme is run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency in partnership with the Association of Colleges and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.

- We aim to reach all colleges and work-based learning providers.
- We offer extra support to colleges and work-based learning providers that are receiving Standards Fund money to improve their practice.
- All our activity themes are backed by a programme of research and evaluation.
- The Raising Quality and Achievement Programme is funded by a grant to the Learning and Skills Development Agency from the Learning and Skills Council.

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